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Unworking Poetic Address

A Comparative Study on Emily Dickinson, Maurice Blanchot,
Paul Celan and Jean-Luc Nancy

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of

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En memoria de Rafa Reyes y dedicada a Erik

Declaration of Authorship

This thesis is submitted to the University of Warwick in support of my application for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. I declare that it is my own work and that it has not been submitted for a degree at another university.

Abstract

This thesis studies the element of poetic address in the work of two poets for whom address is a relational element that is connected to an awareness of finitude: Emily Dickinson and Paul Celan. Their poems privilege the idea of sending rather than saying; and focus more on addressing, challenging, and diverting yet calling the reader rather than on building meaning. This relational emphasis is also at the center of a discussion on community and literature held between Maurice Blanchot and Jean-Luc Nancy in the 1980s, which is predominantly studied from political perspectives that regard their concern with the literary as imprecise or secondary. I claim that, in their quest to think of an alternative form of community that is not based on the production of a common essence by its members, the State and institutions, they privilege and revalue literary address. By thinking about literature in the light of dying and finitude, Blanchot and Nancy stress its potential to open up relations with others at the limit of what is common, present, and representable. Their reflections thus provide an illuminating framework to help us understand the notions of address developed by both poets. Moreover, I seek to show that the differences between these two philosophers' positions correspond to certain significant differences in the notion of address in Dickinson and Celan's work. This allows me to develop a comparative reflection on the pairs Blanchot-Dickinson and Celan-Nancy.

Introduction

The question of address is a question about our relation to others. An investigation into literary and poetic address involves thinking about *how* literature and poetry call every unknown other; designing the routes, turns, and dead ends of innumerable yet singular acts of reading. Written address involves more absence than presence, more longing than achievement, more loss than gain. I'm interested in studying and revaluing these poetic assertions of relationality especially when they are devoted to loss, otherness and incompleteness.

Jean-Luc Nancy and Maurice Blanchot connect the question of community to literature in this direction in *The Inoperative Community* (1983,1986) and *The Unavowable Community* (1983) respectively. They reflect on literary address from a relational perspective, beyond its function of representing or transmitting content, or of identifying or determining an individual –who is either present or absent– to whom a text is speaking. Their discussion connects with the poetics of Emily Dickinson and Paul Celan because for all of them address mainly involves the sheer movement of sending: an appeal to an other, to the one who makes address and the text possible in the first place—possible yet interrupted by the otherness that the possibility of calling exposes it to. Thus, address represents a gap in the literary text that does not allow it to coincide with itself and be whole. This incompleteness leads each of these authors to connect literature to dying and finitude in different ways that have an essential link with address.

Following Bataille, for whom a specific kind of communication releases the unreserved negativity of death, Nancy and Blanchot believe the specificity of literature is that it exempts address –and language– from their mediating and identifying purposes. The suspension of the process of mediation and the moment of identity is what they call “the unworking” (*désœuvrement*), which I will explain in the first chapter. For now, I shall simply note that, as a site of the unworking, literature gives us the chance to think of and be in relations that don't have a productive aim and aren't inclined to closure and totality.

Since literary studies usually treat address as a lyric trope, and the direct second person or “you” address from the perspectives of dialogism or intersubjectivity (centered around the exchange and coproduction of meaning), I will show that the connections Blanchot and Nancy make in these two texts between literature and the unworking

constitute a major contribution to literary studies and poetics. This is especially so in the cases of Dickinson and Celan, for whom, as I will argue, address and finitude are the conditions of possibility of the poem itself. In both cases the second person address sets up relations with readers that are not bound to self-presence, subjectivity, and the completion of the work. Accordingly, this thesis studies the structures of poetic address in Dickinson and Celan, taking further the illuminating way in which the two philosophers connect literary address and the unworking in *The Inoperative Community* and *The Unavowable Community*.

Over the years, Blanchot and Nancy's debate on community has drawn a great deal of attention from ethical and political perspectives (Bernasconi, 1993; Bird, 2008; James, 2010; Van Rooden, 2011; Hole, 2013; Devisch, 2014). Nancy himself has never abandoned the question of community, publishing "The Confronted Community" in 2001 and *The Disavowed Community* in 2014. However, with the exception of Lars Iyer's *Blanchot's Communism* (2004) and Jed Deppman's "Jean-Luc Nancy, Myth, and Literature" (1997) there appear to be few critical studies that highlight the importance of literature and address in their reflection on community. The lack of scholarly work addressing the question of literature in this debate is surprising given that their discussion provides an unprecedented account of the illegibility that cuts across texts, reading processes and subjects. It involves a resistance to the representational and signifying functions of language that dislocates the borders separating literature, ethics and politics. I believe literary theory must also engage with the shift of these borders and offer a unique perspective to think it through.

The latest editions of Dickinson's texts are revealing characteristics of her poems and writing practice that call for renewed philosophical frameworks to study her work. I am referring to books like *The Gorgeous Nothings* (2013), an edition of the manuscripts of poems she wrote on used and cut envelopes; *Dickinson's Poems as She Preserved Them* (2016), a reading edition of the fascicles and loose poems that includes the word variants of poems that Crisanne Miller, the editor, does not consider had a final draft. And of course we now have free, online access to all her manuscripts owned by Harvard, which are also thought-provoking because they allow us to see all the word variants and blank spaces usually left out of reading editions. In consequence, I consider that Dickinson scholars today must face the recent editions' challenges by seeking new concepts and ways of theorizing that respond promptly to these materials. All of which affirm, as I will

argue in the second chapter, the importance of illegibility and loss in her poems' structures of address and resistance to publication.

Scholars who study her forms of address, like David Porter (1981), Martin Orzeck (1996), Robert Weisbuch (1996) and Virginia Jackson (2006), ultimately center Dickinson's poetics of address and reception around notions of intersubjective meaning making or on the compensation of absence (of the reader and the poet) through the presence of language or of a spiritual essence. These readings are grounded in a metaphysics of presence that does not leave space for the illegible. Following the discussion of Blanchot and Nancy, whose approach to literary address and the unworking is actually a way to rethink community and relationality beyond the metaphysics of presence, my goal is to relate her writing, which defies the dialectical logic of work, to a philosophical discussion that theorizes the withdrawal of the work and claims that literature is a site of unworking relationships. This will ultimately lead me to relate Dickinson's poetics to Blanchot specifically, whose reflection on literature in *The Unavowable Community* also revolves around loss and lack.

In Celan's case, scholars incessantly deal with the questions of illegibility, otherness and relationality from many angles: dialogic studies that relate his approach to Martin Buber or Michael Bakhtin (Lyon, 1971; Friedman, 1997; Eskin, 2000); hermeneutic interpretations of his poems and poetics (Gadamer, 1999; Szondi, 2003; Glazova, 2008); and reflections on ethics (Levinas, 1978; Lacoue-Labarthe, 1999; Derrida, 2005). There are also studies that focus on his concern with nothingness and temporality (Fynsk, 1994; Hamacher, 1994). All of these approaches are extremely lucid and many have been of great help throughout my thesis. However, most of the philosophical approaches to Celan do not take under consideration his engagement with other poets, literary works, and elements, such as address, which are treated as derivative or secondary questions. And those literary studies that do are usually dialogically or hermeneutically driven.

An accurate account of his poetics demands that the barriers between philosophy and poetics be dismantled, and that the influence that creative work had on his poetry and on the development of his structure of poetic address also be put in dialogue with a philosophical framework that departs from the metaphysics of presence. My thesis attempts to remedy this gap by concentrating on the notion of address that Celan developed in the late 50's and early 60's—a period during which he published 10

translations of Dickinson; gave his well-known Darmstadt speech: *The Meridian*; was translating and reading Osip Mandelstam, and seriously engaged with the works of Buber and Martin Heidegger.

During this period, Celan developed a poetics that doesn't privilege *poiesis* but reception, and where listening and addressing overlap. Here address is deployed as an unending movement between two finite beings that has no other origin but reading, which doesn't involve receiving a message but does involve, paradoxically, leaving room for the other's illegibility in a poem that never reaches completion. This is why Nancy's reflections in *The Inoperative Community* are a strong contribution to my project and to Celan studies. His reflections on "literary communism," which deal with literary address, finitude, being-in-common and listening, allow us to think further the strengths and singularity of Celan's poetics during this period. Even though Jacques Derrida and Christopher Fynsk have suggested that a connection can be made between Nancy's concept of *partage* and Celan's conception of difference (Derrida, 2005, p.31; Fynsk, 1994, p.173), up until now there are no major studies connecting Celan and Nancy's work.

Celan published the translations of ten Dickinson poems during his lifetime. All existing studies on the relationship between the two poets are based on these translations (e.g., Blue, 1988; Felstiner, 1988; Wortman, 1988; Rosenthal, 1997; Wolosky, 1999 and 2000; Friedlander, 2005; Gellhaus and Kaiser, 2012) even though—in spite of their geographical and historical distance—Celan and Dickinson also share similar thematic and structural concerns and features. Some of these are their broken syntax, their use of the dash, interruptive silences, their recurrent use of the second-person address, their defiant poems towards God, and an obsession with dying and finitude. In fact, these last two issues are the main thematic concerns in a series of eight translations Celan published in *Die Neue Rundschau* in 1961. The scarce body of critical work on these translations focuses mainly on these thematic elements, although Shira Wolosky does compare the relationship between form and content in their work, specifically in regard to how both poets use a broken syntax to express "a rupture between terrestrial experience and transcendent reference" ("Apophatics" 68).

Currently, there isn't a comparative study that examines both poets' decision to center the poem and its condition of possibility on the movement of address and reading—an alternative way of thinking about the poetic event and its commitment to

open up relationships that privilege finitude, otherness and an experience of reading that doesn't only focus on the meaning of the poems (or that conceives of its silences in function of the production of meaning). This is the aim of my thesis. I am not studying address as a trope in the lyric tradition or in order to ask to whom Dickinson or Celan historically dedicated such and such a poem. I ask Dickinson and Celan what addressing the reader in their poems involves, how they do this and what happens when we try to respond to their call. I study address as a relational drive.

The way Nancy and Blanchot relate literature and community in their works from the 1980s situates relationality in the structure of address itself. The reader and the limits of reading are part of the poem's incompleteness since it is written. Instead of having an active role in the construction of meaning, reading exposes what Bataille, in *Inner Experience*, calls the sovereignty of nothing, which both philosophers interpret in different ways that will be discussed throughout the first chapter. Briefly speaking, for Nancy, it involves the exposure of finitude from one to another that avows their "being-in-common" as a literary being. For Blanchot, it refers to the exposure of the excess of dying that language bears and literary address exposes, which causes an ongoing mutual loss of the self. Accordingly, for Blanchot, a highly dramatic sense of the other's distance gives way to an unavowable community.

The reflection developed by Nancy and Blanchot begins with an acknowledgment of the failure of political communities in the twentieth century (Hole 104) and of the dangerous "reciprocity between communism and individualism" (*TUC* 3). The former works to produce a self-founding community based on fusion and integration, operating within a violent structure of inclusion and exclusion. At the same time, the liberalist atomized and self-productive individual is dangerous since it runs the risk of abandoning the social as such (Devisch 62) and in a way atomizes and reproduces the self-grounding and totalizing structure that communism seeks at a more collective scale. Consequently, both philosophers consider that these two positions tend toward an absolute and are determined by a totalizing dialectical unity. Thinking about community from a purely relational angle that privileges incompleteness is an alternative way of reflecting on the question of community and the reason why Blanchot and Nancy make a connection between the unworking, finitude, and literary address. Ultimately, what is at stake in their discussion is a disinterested and unproductive form of relating to one another.

However, Blanchot and Nancy aren't trying to displace politics and ethics, or to substitute political action and ethical duty with the literary. There will always be an imminent need to recognize, represent and empower many groups of subjects that the totalizing structures of community exclude. In this sense, I agree with Iyer when he writes that Blanchot's community

...which is to say, the openness of an indetermination (...) cannot form the object of a political movement; it cannot stand as an end with respect to the goals its members would hold in common, or as an alternative to the work that would allow a group of people to establish themselves as a group. Openness is not an alternative to sharing, to holding in common, or to the celebration of a shared tradition. It belongs to these movements, to tradition, to collective work, and cannot be thought apart from them. (15)

My thesis concentrates precisely on these ecstatic and unproductive ways of relating to others in which we read the world differently, even less. I approach the literary by letting sense articulate and withdraw in the movement of address, as Nancy proposes. I also try to understand why and how we would relate to the other in the most unbridgeable distance in which dying inscribes us, as Blanchot proposes.

Referring to the exposure of incompleteness that happens in writing, Nancy declares: "a politics that does not want to know anything about this is a mythology or an economy. A literature that does not want to say anything about it is a mere diversion or a lie" (*TIC* 81). More than twenty years after this discussion took place, the political order has indeed turned into an economic one. Literature, however, still resists being turned into a "mere diversion or a lie." This is not because the publishing industry has made an effort to resist capitalism—this is not the case at all—but because the way in which literary address and finitude are bound up together, in cases like these, turns the literary into a site that is open to difference and to the one to come. By thinking about unworking communities in connection to literature, Nancy and Blanchot are keeping "a door ajar," as Dickinson once wrote, to the question of being together that does not involve the production or accomplishment of something that a group of people might have in common.

This threshold marks the angle from which I will read, question and relate these four authors. For Dickinson and Celan address and finitude are fundamental, structural concerns; because of this, the concept of the unworking allows me to approach the

relations opened by their structures of address in a new light. Moreover, the different ways in which Nancy and Blanchot relate the unworking to literature correspond with the different directions that address and finitude take in the case of each poet. This correspondence structurally strengthens this comparative project between two unworking poetics and theories of community, turning the literary into a scenario that makes room for sheer relationality, unbound from the production of a common essence and open to difference.

I have decided to work on the philosophers and the poets separately, only relating them in the last chapter, in order to avoid turning either of the two into examples of the other; in order to avoid subordinating literature to philosophy or vice versa. It is important to place both disciplines on equal terms. It is often the case that the field is understood as philosophy *of* literature. From this perspective literature is approached in order to exemplify philosophical concepts or as an object of study that needs philosophy in order to be thought. This is not my position: I want to show that both disciplines have complementary ways of thinking and performing. Accordingly, my thesis is divided into four chapters.

Chapter one, “Exposing Nothing: Literature and Community in Nancy and Blanchot,” introduces the political and philosophical context that led both authors to reopen the question of “community” and “communism” in the 1980s, tracing their dialogue with Bataille on this issue. I simultaneously develop the concept of the unworking and start to stress the differences between the “inoperative” and “unavowable” communities. Then I trace the different ways in which both philosophers relate the questions of dying and finitude to the problem of community and relationality specifically. In the last section I argue that this reflection relies on literary address and cannot be studied without it.

In the second chapter: “A Poetics of Loss,” I present the way Dickinson’s poems are unworked by their formats of inscription and strategies of address, which affirm finitude and incompleteness. I begin by introducing the poet’s life and writing practice by reflecting on the way she transgressed the idea of a project and a product by paradoxically *consigning* her work to loss and powerlessness instead of profit and power. Later I show that the idea of loss is also at the core of her poems’ structures of address, which I argue take after the model of epistolary correspondence and the experience of facing somebody else’s death. Here the reflections on epistolary correspondence that

Derrida presents in *The Post Card* are of great help, given that they also revolve around a conception of writing that defies the metaphysics of presence, and which is also at the bottom of the concept of “the unworking.” The last part of this chapter ties together my previous arguments in a close reading of a poem that I consider emblematic of the relationship between finitude and poetic address in Dickinson, “Going to Her! Happy Letter.”

In “The Darkness Slingshot,” I argue that Celan’s *Meridian* speech defines the poetic event around sending and reception, but also questions legibility, moving away from a concern with the comprehension and communication of meaning. Since one of my objectives is to connect the influence that creative work and philosophy had on his structure of address, the “Introduction” follows the development of Celan’s poetic quest in a historical context, in order to understand why he felt close to Osip Mandelstam’s poetics in the early 60s. Afterwards, I develop core issues of the *The Meridian* in which the question of poetic address is being thought: such as the relationships between art and poetry and language and finitude. In the last section, I refer explicitly to the way Celan’s speech incorporates the ideas of Mandelstam, Buber and Heidegger, in order to develop a structure of poetic address that involves the exposure of different temporalities.

Finally, in the last chapter, “Unworking Poetics and Communities,” I relate the four authors and strengthen the connections between the previous chapters. In the first section I examine the theoretical implications of Dickinson’s transgression of the twinned concepts of closure and totality and the way the reader is exposed to finitude in her poems in dialogue with Blanchot’s *The Unavowable Community*. I aim to show that they both think of writing as a “dispossessing gift.” In the second section I argue that Celan and Nancy both arrive at the conclusion that the only way to encounter the primordial otherness of being is through a type of communication that privileges the very movement of sending over the construction and transmission of a message. They think of being and writing at the limits of communication.

The third and last section of chapter four, “The ‘Translations,’” analyzes two Dickinson poems that Celan translated. Comparing both versions provides a unique opportunity to answer the main questions of my thesis: what is the relationship between poetic address and unworking communities, and how does this relationship allow us to understand the two poets and the two philosophers better? This comparative exercise shows how Celan dealt with the questions of reception and difference himself; how, in

Nancy's terms, his singular site faced Dickinson's. Furthermore, the proximity between the practice of translation and unworking communities that the Dickinson-Celan relationship puts forward, as well as the unworking community that takes place in each translation itself, illuminate similarities and differences in Nancy and Blanchot's discussion. The thesis thus ends with a comparative exercise that also postulates translation as one of the most significant manifestations of unworking address—not only because it is impossible to translate fully and effectively from one linguistic community into another, but because the original text is always already incomplete, cut across by loss and lack.

1. Exposing Nothing

Literature and Community for Nancy and Blanchot

“Existence is communication”
—Bataille

In the 1980s, Blanchot and Nancy held a discussion on community that is recorded in *The Unavowable Community* (1983) and *The Inoperative Community* (1983) respectively.¹ They sought an alternative to thinking of community on the basis of a common essence or as the production of a common essence by its members, the State and institutions. The reflections developed in these two texts privilege relationality at the limits of the subject, language and the common. The question of literature becomes relevant for them because literary language can address the other in the midst of illegibility; it exceeds the fields of identification, representation and signification, setting up relations that are not governed by presence, unity, and productivity. In this order of ideas, their discussion contributes to transform and expand our understanding of the relationships that take place when we read and write.

In this chapter I will trace how Nancy and Blanchot each connect the question of community to “the unworking” (*désœuvrement*) and to literary address. This way, I will set the stage to study the structures of address in Emily Dickinson and Paul Celan in the next two chapters. I will start by explaining what motivates the philosophers’ discussion in these two texts as I simultaneously develop the reasons why literature and the unworking are main concepts in their conversation. In the second section, I will present how death and finitude play a role in the way they each propose a notion of relationality that defies the metaphysics of presence, which will allow me to develop the main differences between Blanchot’s *unavowable* and Nancy’s *unworking* communities. Lastly, I will show that their discussion on community, finitude and dying relies on writing, and, more specifically, literary address.

1.1. COMMUNITY AND THE UNWORKING

In the spring of 1983, Nancy published his article “*La communauté désœuvrée*” in an issue of the journal *Aléa*, edited by Jean-Cristophe Bailly and dedicated to the theme of

¹ From now on, I will reference them as *TUC* and *TIC*.

community. The issue was called: “The Community, the Number.” Nancy recalls that the invitation to participate in this issue was “symptomatic of an era” because it redeployed the term community; a “marginal” but “intense” term that

...had been fiercely debated during the preceding twenty years, whose tipping point had been '68. During the economic and geopolitical transformations of the 80's, hippie communities, those communities imagined and attempted by the thousand in Europe and the Americas in the name of sexual liberation, zero growth, ecology, Christian, Buddhist, councilist, or socializing sensibilities, had sustained a slowly but constantly declining imaginary. (*The Disavowed Community* 7)

It was a time when neoliberalism was growing stronger and communism had failed; it was the decade when the Iron Curtain started to collapse and the Iron Lady rose to power. Summoned by a sense of urgency, Blanchot responded to Nancy's article by publishing *The Unavowable Community* at the end of the same year:

In the wake of an important text by Jean-Luc Nancy, I would again take up a reflection (...) concerning the communist exigency, the relations between the exigency and the possibility or impossibility of a community at a time when even the ability to understand community seems to have been lost (but isn't community outside intelligibility?). (1)

His reference to the communist exigency declares a left-wing expectation in a moment of crisis for left-wing Marxist thinkers due to the violent, totalitarian outcomes of communism in the twentieth century and to the rise of neoliberalism. It is also a reference to a passage by Sartre that Nancy quoted at the beginning of his text in order to state that the question of communism and community should not be left behind, even though the way in which it is asked and how they are defined must be revised. This concern is the point of departure of both texts. Neither aims to propose or produce a new type of social cell. Instead, they each show that relationality does not always depend on having something in common, or on producing and communing with a shared essence, an understanding of and nostalgic desire for community that Nancy stresses we have inherited from Christianity and which resurged in its most violent form with Fascism (Nancy, *TIC* 10-12; 17).

The parenthesis at the end of Blanchot's fragment, which asks if community does not lie outside intelligibility, alludes to the specificity of his reflection, which is named in the book's title: the *unavowable* community. By inscribing this term in the title,

Blanchot starts to tie writing and community together: community's unintelligibility is related to a non-representational and non-semantic function of language. In dialogue with Bataille and Levinas, his text slowly makes the case that the unavowable is not about keeping something secret; rather, it is an unfulfillable yet multiple address that cannot develop itself in words: "always already lost, it has no use" and "creates no work" (*TUC* 12). Thus, from the very start, this strange and unusual reflection on community is linked to a writing that has no other purpose than exposing itself as it calls the other.

The difference between both titles is representative of how Blanchot and Nancy's approach to community differs: whilst the former stresses an impossibility at the heart of language, where the unavowable community takes place and which also questions the possibility of naming community itself,² Nancy's reflection is ontological, and "the unworking" will ultimately become the name he gives to a way of being-in-common.³ But this doesn't mean that Blanchot's unavowable community is not unworking or that Nancy's reflection is unrelated to writing. This isn't the case at all. In 1986, Nancy's essay was reprinted along with two newer ones: "Myth Interrupted" and "Literary Communism," which developed further, and from different perspectives, the relationships between literature and community that were suggested in *The Inoperative Community*. Here, in conversation with Bataille and Heidegger, "literary communication" refers to a written inscription that exposes the unsharable: finitude.

The word "*désœuvrement*," which Nancy inscribes in his essay's title and also used in the title of the book in 1986, is the central concept "at work" in the discussion and in the way both writers relate the question of community to literature. It will be developed in depth as the thesis develops. For the moment, I will anticipate that it is indebted to Bataille's reception of Alexander Kojève's lessons on Hegel, which Lars Iyer provides a remarkable account of in the chapter "The Beast in Me" included in his book *Blanchot's Communism* (2004). For Kojève, the consciousness of death distinguishes humans from animals because it allows us to dialectically negate our natural and given beings, bodies,

² Blanchot's response is partly motivated by an affirmation made by Nancy at the beginning of *The Inoperative Community* in which it is said that reflections on community, including Blanchot's, "were not able to communicate explicitly and thematically (even if 'explicit' and 'thematic' are only very fragile categories here), with a thinking on community" (4). According to Christopher Fynsk, this "astonishing sentence betrays a lack of awareness of Blanchot's extensive involvement with the question, and an insufficient recognition of why 'thematic,' and 'explicit' and even 'communicate' were such problematic terms in Blanchot's case" ("Perhaps Already" 144).

³ In "Naming the Nothing: Nancy and Blanchot on Community" (2010), Ian James claims that one of the main reproaches "Blanchot expresses in relation to Nancy's reading of Bataille" is that he uses "the language of being-with or existence (...) to 'avow' the nothing of community" (176).

through actions—this is what he calls freedom. Humans are finite specifically because they turn death into the underlying force of life’s possibilities. However, for Bataille there is a non-actualisable negativity that cannot be negated—that brings out our animality, and which does not negate our given, dying body (Iyer 27).

Unemployable negativity resists investment in activity. I once took a picture of a woman sleeping in a garden next to two crows. Just as I shot it, one of them took off. I’ve always imagined that the bird’s unsettling image represents an excess of her unconscious that resisted being turned into the dream she was having at that moment; as if there existed an infinite, unemployed negativity left over all the time, which I caught on camera.



This is what the unworking refers to: the interruption of a process in which something would be made and completed, assuring the openness, uselessness and unproductivity of a nothingness that would normally be negated in the process of becoming something. For Bataille, Blanchot and Nancy, it resists identity, production and unity at the level of writing, thinking, being and community.

In regard to the content of his essay from 1983, Nancy says it was, in part, the outcome of three years in which he questioned “the essence of the political” in the *Center for Philosophical Research on the Political* that he founded with Lacoue-Labarthe; and, in part, the outcome of a yearlong seminar he taught on Bataille, which focused specifically on his political thought (Armstrong xvii). Both of these influences resonate strongly in *The Inoperative Community*, especially in regard to the importance of relating finitude to the question of community and of thinking of community as an existential way of being. In order to get there, Nancy carefully traces Bataille’s critique of communism, and the way he transforms our understanding of the political subject in his political works and also in his work on writing and the literary.

Accordingly, Bataille first criticized Stalinism for betraying Marxism and sacrificing sovereignty for production.⁴ The latter became the only value and human beings were reduced to servility and valued only as a means of production through their labor. At this point, Nancy's diagnosis is that Bataille did not think the problem was related to communism as such, but that "Stalin's actions tended to mix the interests of Russia with those of communism" (*The Accursed Share* 273). The interests of Russia were those of industrial growth, accumulation and production; this is to say, the interests of what he calls a restricted economy. But later Bataille realized that communism, not simply Stalinism, carried in it the risk of sacrificing sovereignty and giving form to totalitarianism: "It was the very basis of the communist ideal that ended up appearing most problematic: namely, human beings defined as producers (one might even add: human beings *defined* at all)" (Nancy, *TIC* 2).

In the last two remarks, Nancy interweaves his reading of Bataille with Heidegger's critique of humanism in the *Letter on Humanism* (1949). Here, Heidegger discusses two problems that are central to Nancy's reading of Bataille. First, that all communist doctrines, including Marxism, ground their idea of humanity, or their answer to what being human means, on a "metaphysical determination according to which every being appears as the material of labor," as "the self-establishing process of production" (202).⁵ Secondly, Nancy's parenthesis also points to Heidegger's critique of humanism, which is that it is determined by a pre-established interpretation of beings as a whole and does not put into question the relation of Being to the essence of man (202). This is precisely what Nancy and Blanchot both want to move past: the metaphysical, pre-established interpretations of being and community. Instead of thinking of community from the perspective of the production or recovery of a lost or predestined common essence, they open a discussion that proposes a way of thinking about who we are, and who we are when we are together, which doesn't quite allow for these to be two

⁴ In Bataille, the concept of sovereignty is not related to autocracy but to life beyond utility and gain. In *The Accursed Share* (1949), he relates *energy* to economy and states that in a restricted economy (the capitalist form of economy that developed after the Middle Ages and the liberal economies developed in the late 18th and 19th century) money is accumulated and invested in the future, causing human beings to work for a life that they will only be able to live later. But there is always excess energy: wealth. With it a system has two options: growth and accumulation or non-productive expenditure, squander. This requires a choice that affirms servility and can lead to violence or that unleashes sovereignty. In many of his works it refers to pleasure, idleness, unemployability, and nothingness.

⁵ This Hegelian perspective, which I mentioned before in the reference to Kojève, is also criticized by Bataille.

different questions.⁶

In this order of ideas, their approach to community makes it difficult for us to keep using the terms “political” and “subject.” Thinking about unworking and unavowable communities requires that we stop *defining* the human being as a *zōon politikon* that exercises its virtues in the social context of the *polis*. As for Aristotle, this type of community is not a result of *poiesis* (making or production), but neither is it, as Aristotle did think, a result of *praxis*. It is a relationship that shatters the unity of the subject as it takes place. In order to suspend or render inoperative the self-establishing process of production of individuals and communities, writing and the non-actualisable reserve of the unworking come to the fore. Precisely, by the “escaping or unworking of the dialectic, Nancy proceeds to the problem of community” (Devisch 29). Similarly, for Blanchot, “community (...) happens in the experience of worklessness that falls outside work and its voluntary renunciation” (Iyer 2).

Fourteen years before Nancy opened this discussion, Blanchot had developed the term *désœuvrement* in *The Infinite Conversation* (1969). There he also referred to production and to writing’s resistance to create a work,⁷ and was already relating an unproductive and unavowable way of writing to the question of community:

...no longer the writing that has always (through a necessity in no way avoidable) been in the service of speech or thought that is called idealist (that is to say moralizing), but rather the writing that through its own slowly liberated force (the aleatory force of absence) seems to devote itself solely to itself as something that remains without identity, and little by little brings forth possibilities that are entirely other: an anonymous, distracted, deferred, and dispersed way of being in relation, by which everything is brought into question — and first of all the idea of God, of the Self, of the Subject, then of Truth and the One, then finally the idea of the Book and the Work — so that this writing (understood in its enigmatic rigor), far from having the Book as its goal rather signals its end: a writing that could be said to be outside discourse, outside language. (...) Writing in this way passes through the advent of communism, recognized as the ultimate affirmation — communism being still always beyond communism. (xii)

⁶ To be more precise, Nancy answers *who* we are with the concept of *being-in-common*, and, for Blanchot, when we *are together* we can’t really ask who each of us *is* and can’t really *be* together. Soon I will develop what causes these differences and what they mean.

⁷ In the “Translator’s Preface” of *The Unavowable Community*, Joris traces Blanchot’s use of the word back to 1952 in *The One Who Was Standing Apart From Me* (*Celui que ne m’Accompagnait pas*), where it refers to idleness. Lydia Davis translates it with the passive “worklessness,” but Joris does not agree with this translation because the way Blanchot employs the term *désœuvrement* and *désœuvré* also has an active sense, which he thus decides to translate with the gerund “the unworking.”

This is a long, dense passage from the preface that I will go through slowly: it includes a critique of logocentrism and the metaphysics of presence, and a distinction between a type of writing that would support the latter and one which wouldn't. The second one is related to communism in similar terms to the ones that reemerge in the 80's: *beyond* communism.

The first part echoes the critique of logocentrism and the metaphysics of presence that Jacques Derrida developed specifically in relation to writing in *Of Grammatology* (1967), published only two years before. Here, Derrida revises a tradition of thought, from Plato to Hegel, which determined "the being of the entity as presence" (*Of Grammatology* 12). In this tradition, writing has always been considered inferior and secondary to speech. Derrida first explains this through the structure of the sign developed by Saussure, who defines it in the light of an absence: the signified that the signifier refers to. Therefore, when Blanchot refers to an "idealist" writing that would be in the service of speech (as the body to the soul), he is referring to a logocentric conception that considers writing to be defective—further away from the Truth, like art and poetry for Plato—subordinate, and supplementary. In this tradition, to gain absolute knowledge involves the effacement of writing (26), because metaphysics "consists of excluding non-presence by determining the supplement as simple exteriority, pure addition or pure absence. The work of exclusion operates with the structure of supplementarity" (167). In simpler terms, metaphysics wants to peel all the layers of the onion in order to get to the core, its true essence. But what Derrida wants to show is that onions are only made of layers.

Through an exhaustive and critical reading of Rousseau, he argues that there is no whole, self-present being or origin; nothing but chains of supplementarity and difference. The concept of origin is defined by Derrida as "the myth of addition" because it depends on everything that is exterior and added to it. Therefore "originary difference" has a supplementary structure that shakes metaphysical hierarchies as well as the inner and outer dichotomy. This is why the second type of writing that Blanchot mentions above puts into question idealist, unitary and self-enclosed structures (of "God, the Subject, the Self, the One, the Book and the Work"). Writing thus becomes an image and the event of what "remains without identity, and little by little brings forth possibilities that are entirely other: an anonymous, distracted, deferred, and dispersed way of being in relation." This type of relationality is precisely what Blanchot calls

“communism beyond communism.”

This form of communism, which has very little to do with communism as we are used to thinking about it (as a social, economic and political project), underlies the way I will analyze the structures of address of two poets whose writing also defies the metaphysics of presence and the notions of a complete and unitary subject who reads and writes. Dickinson and Celan, as we will see, “sovereignly” question and unwork the conditions of possibility of the book (Dickinson) and a poem (Dickinson and Celan), stressing their essential incompleteness, their originary difference.

Just as Blanchot distinguishes between two types of writing, there are also two ways of thinking about community at stake here (three if we count that Blanchot and Nancy have different views, but it is too early to say why): one is as a totalizing dialectical unity, and the other involves a way of being in relation that unworks the possibility of presence, unity, and identity. This is why there is also a critique of the metaphysics of presence in the way Nancy and Blanchot decide to rethink community. In *Against the Romance of Community*, Miranda Joseph recounts the common traits of the “political critiques of community-as-unity” (xxv) that she encountered in poststructuralist and feminist theories since the 1980’s, amongst these are Nancy and Blanchot’s. She concludes that, in these critiques, “community” refers to social practices that are based on the production of identity, unity, communion and purity. Joseph states that

observing the use of the term community in such social practices, critics noted a diverse range of oppressions, including but by no means limited to genocidal violence, that seemed to follow from the idealization and deployment of community. Many scholars and activists observed that communities seem inevitably to be constituted in relation to internal and external enemies and that these defining others are then elided, excluded, or actively repressed. (xviii-xix)

Nancy refers to this as the logic of immanent communities, where the aim is to eliminate difference through the production of a common essence that absorbs and defines the same people who produce it. Let’s recall that in his critique of the metaphysics of presence Derrida states that what is exterior is deemed defective and subordinate. In the context of community, this is the cause of oppression, repression and violence.

In *The Inoperative Community* and *The Unavowable Community*, the ideal of

“community-as-unity” is displaced by the notion of “literary communism.”⁸ Literary because relationality takes place in writing and requires acts of reading that privilege address over the production and exchange of meaning; the call and exposure that literary inscription involves over what is said. And communism because it values community over individuality; but community has to be understood as a sheer, unproductive relationality that renounces to produce a common essence by subjects that would be absorbed into a larger body that determines them and which they identify with. To add the word “literary” to communism thus serves the purpose of pointing out that the reflection at stake is about a “communism *beyond* communism;” a reflection that seeks to free the concept of community from the metaphysics of presence and the logic of immanence.⁹ What allows Nancy and Blanchot to tie the two together and unwork the immanence of community is also indebted to Bataille, who had a particular understanding of language and of where literature and poetry could reach: the impossible. For the three of them, literature always addresses someone, it can expose finitude, and affirm the excess of dying that cannot be negated. This, however, is also where Nancy and Blanchot part ways.

1.2. A COMMUNITY OF FINITUDES

I mentioned earlier that Bataille distances himself from Hegel and Kojève by affirming that we are not fully capable of assuming death as power or possibility; that there is a non-actualisable negativity which brings out the “the beast in us.” Nancy recounts that in Bataille’s approach to communism he stresses communism went astray because it denied the unemployable “sovereign excess of finitude.” Defining the human being as a producer supposes that we have the power to conquer death, which we don’t. For this reason, Bataille obsesses with thinking and writing about being and community sovereignly: not as an affirmation of power but the contrary, as the affirmation of the excess of nothing. His *oeuvre* asks us to assume this powerlessness in the way we are, and

⁸ It stands out that in *The Unavowable Community* and *The Unworking Community* the term community is maintained, but only in order to be transformed, which is the reason that their titles anticipate a rejection of presence, speech, production and work. However, 20 years later, Nancy stated that this was not enough because the term is unfortunately still bound to the idea of a project of completion; instead, he says that he prefers to use the term “in-common” (“Around the Notion of Literary Communism” 26).

⁹ In *The Inoperative Community*, Nancy clarifies that “literary communism” “can hardly be aligned with the idea of ‘communism’ or with the idea of ‘literature’ as we habitually use either of them. ‘Literary communism’ is named thus only as a provocative gesture—although at the same time the name cannot fail to be a necessary homage to what communism and the communists, on the one hand, and literature and writers on the other, have meant for an epoch of our history” (82).

in the ways we think, read, relate, and communicate. “Bataille’s life would attest to an excessiveness of death over the possibility of its mobilization, remaining a workless, idle leftover, unaccounted for in the onroll of the dialectic” (Iyer 31). This powerlessness dispossesses everyone. Therefore, Bataille’s question is how we can affirm it; accept it together, without negating it, and accepting that it constantly draws us away from others and ourselves.

Bataille’s critique is not only directed at communism’s failure, but also at the greedy, monadic individual fostered by liberalism. This is why his response to the question of community involves the disruption of relationships between autonomous, self-present subjects. What Bataille seeks for, and Nancy and Blanchot after him, is another way of thinking about relations at the limits of the “subject” and of the solipsistic process of production that the Hegelian dialectic encloses the subject in. From this position, a relationship cannot possibly be mediated by “recognition or reciprocity, it remains dissymmetrical and unilateral (...) and exceeds the realm of signification. For Hegel and Kojève, this would entail precisely the breakdown of relationality and being-in-common” (Iyer 137), but for Bataille the condition of possibility of relationality is the subjects’ incompleteness, unreserved negativity.

Following Bataille then, in *The Unavowable Community* Blanchot displaces the desire of recognition with the dissymmetry of dying. To be exposed to a person who is dying sets us in a relation that thwarts the possibility of the unity of the subject and of a relation between two present subjects that would seek a solipsistic confirmation of the self in the other. For Blanchot, exposure to the dying other is, in a sense, existentially contagious: it also *deprives* the companion’s being of power and self-presence:

To remain present in the proximity of another who absents himself by dying (...), to take upon myself another’s death as the only death that concerns me, this is what puts me beside myself, this is the only separation that can open me, in its very impossibility, to the Openness of a community. (*TUC* 9)

He is responding to Bataille’s call by thinking of a relationship that takes into account the dispossessing impossibilities that we are also bound to, because our mortal lives cannot be reduced to the domains of power and possibility. Here, the incommensurable absenting movement of one person creates a gap, an unbridgeable separation and a sense of incompleteness from the other person that is unbearable and which devastates her to the extent of stepping outside the self in the *unavowable* awareness and pain of the

impossibility of community. This is why the unavowable community is also described as “the absence of community:” relationality is unleashed by impossibility.

Blanchot provides an example of this kind of relationship in the second part of his book, “The Community of Lovers,” with a reading of the relationship between the two lovers of Marguerite Duras’s story *La Maladie de la Mort*. The way in which Duras narrates their relationship helps Blanchot develop a notion of love that takes place only when it cannot be fulfilled. Its affirmation happens through impossibility and loss instead of fusion: “you weep,” says the female character, “because you can’t love. You weep because you can’t impose death” (Duras in *TUC* 40). At this point, Blanchot’s reflection is closely connected to Bataille because the impossibility of love—which is the only way there can be love or at least a finite community in this story—is based on the uncontrollable and unsublatable excess of dying. But when Blanchot stresses the dissymmetry between the lovers, which thwarts the possibility of fusion and the realization of their love, he says he is speaking of the same dissymmetry which, “according to Levinas, marks the irre reciprocity of the ethical relationship between the other and me, I who am never on equal terms with the Other...” (40). For this reason, he dedicates a brief section to reflect on the connection between “Ethics and Love” in order to clarify the role of Levinas in the discussion.

To think this over, Blanchot quotes two sentences from the story: “You ask how loving can happen – the emotion of loving. She answers: Perhaps through a lapse in the logic of the universe. She says: Through a mistake, for instance. She says: Never through an act of will” (Duras in *TUC* 41). And: “Where does the emotion of love spring from? (...) From anything...maybe from the approach of death...” (41) In regard to the first sentence Blanchot stresses that love is disconnected from a willing self-present subject. It only occurs as a lapse of logic, a mistake. In the second, death –the limit of everything– is what destines love to incompleteness. Not precisely because we will die and it will end, but because being exposed to the other’s unbearable movement of dying is what releases their dissymmetry. At this point of the text his reflection is written in a tone that reveals anger and frustration, because community overflows

...consciousness, breaking with self-involvement and demanding — without rights — that which removes itself from all demands, because in my request there is not only the beyond of what could satisfy it, but the beyond of what is requested. An (...) outrage of life that cannot be contained within life which thus, interrupting the pretension of

always preserving in being, opens to the strangeness of an interminable dying or an endless 'error.'(41)

His decision to quote the previous sentences and follow up with this passage aims to separate the order of ethics from love. Even though he does attribute the relation of dissymmetry to Levinas's ethics, the last sentence of this passage point elsewhere; to the fact that Blanchot does not want to inscribe an ethical order in the unavowable community. This is what arises when he quotes the sentence that relates love to a mistake and connects dying to an "endless error" in the passage above. The deprivation of being caused by the exposure to the dying others comes very close to what Levinas calls the "*il y a*:" an impersonal state of exteriority in which "the interior of the subject has been evacuated; the subject is no longer correlative with a world but is, so to speak, outside of it. Perhaps one should say: exposed to it" (Bruns, "Art and Poetry in Levinas" 215). For Levinas the "*il y a*" is, precisely, an erratic state, a mistake, a level of impersonality that ethics corrects and releases us from. But Blanchot is stressing that community, in this case love, can only happen erratically. The difference is marked even further because even though Levinas also privileges a way of speaking to the other in which relationality happens at the level of address and not of what is said, "the Saying" always institutes the ethical order in which signification is bestowed upon another (Davies 190) and saves us from the erratic "*il y a*." For Blanchot, however, "the *il y a* is indissociable from the address of the other" and "institutes nothing" (Iyer 105).

So even though Blanchot incorporates the notion of dissymmetry and similar categories to the "Saying" and the "*il y a*" in his thought on literary communism, he also claims independence from Levinas and a stronger tie with Bataille, whose notion of communication, as developed in the 40's specifically, privileges the sovereignty of nothing, the exposure of an unreserved movement of dying that does not institute any kind of order or signification.

For his part, Nancy is neither concerned with ethics nor with reaching this erratic state. For him, the subject can never really "be thrown outside of itself" because that is its primordial ontological condition, there isn't an "itself" to begin with. On a different philosophical path than Blanchot, he sees potential in Bataille's reflections on writing and community to think of community ontologically and take Heidegger's being-with a step further. In *Being and Time* it is said that "Being-with is an existential characteristic of Dasein" (§26 156), but Nancy wants to show that being-with is more than a

characteristic of *Dasein*; to be more exact, that *Dasein* is always a being-with; that being-with is its “originary and constitutive quality” (Nancy, “Ser-con y democracia” 6). In this regard, he points out that Heidegger reduced being-with to be a secondary quality of *Dasein* and that, because of this, it was insufficiently related to being-towards-death:

All of Heidegger’s research into “being-for (or toward)-death” was an attempt to state this: *I* is not –am not– a subject. (Although, when it came to the question of community as such, the same Heidegger also went astray with his version of a people and a destiny conceived at least in part as a subject, which proves no doubt that *Dasein*’s “being-toward-death” was never radically implicated in its being-with—in *Mitsein*—and that this implication is the one that remains to be thought). (*TIC* 14)

This is a dense passage in which some of Nancy’s reflections on ontology and existence are at stake. First, he acknowledges that Heidegger’s critique of the metaphysics of the subject has oriented his own thought on existence and being as exteriority, as exposure. Second, he hints at the task that grounds his work and thought around the relationship between ontology and politics: to relate *Mitsein* to *Dasein*’s being-toward-death. This task has at least two goals: first, to resignify *Dasein* as primordially being-with. Second, to think about community from the perspective of the exposure of finitudes instead of a common destiny or people, which is what each *inooperative* community is up against. Hence, Nancy sees potential in Bataille’s reflections on communication and the link between relationality and finitude to radically implicate *Dasein*’s “being-toward-death” in being-with. In other words, he sees a potentiality in Bataille’s thought to think about community from an ontological rather than an immanent perspective, which is how Heidegger went astray when thinking about community. However, Nancy does not approach ontology with the question of being but, rather, of community –but only because for him the question of being *is* the question of community.

Nancy and Blanchot agree that finitude and incompleteness are conditions of what they are calling community; and that relations that suspend the metaphysics of presence and the logic of immanence of a community involve thinking about the exteriority of being. However, for Blanchot, exposure to the dying other makes a fissure in Heidegger’s ontology: *Dasein* is exceeded until the point of depriving it from *Sein*. At the basis of Blanchot’s position is Levinas, who asks, in *Otherwise than Being*, “whether there can be a sense of openness that is not one of the disclosure of being” (Davies, “Sincerity and the End” 164). Nancy’s position, on the other side, is not as destructive.

He argues that *Sein* is always already a *mit* or being-in-common. One of the clearest formulations of his contribution to this problem is his notion of *clinamen*, an ontological inclination towards others: “Community is at least the *clinamen* of the ‘individual.’ Yet there is no theory, ethics, politics of metaphysics of the individual that is capable of envisaging this *clinamen* (...) they never *inclined* it, outside itself, over that edge that opens up its being-in-common” (*TIC* 4).

Ignas Devisch points out that “Blanchot and Bataille will bestow the idea of community with a negative and subversive, even outright destructive, character...” (28), while Nancy “patiently tries to develop a positive expression of the philosophy of community” (196). Indeed, the *clinamen* is a more positive affirmation of community as it opens beings to what they are not but still preserves the ontological framework. For Blanchot, being-towards-death makes the “being” of being-with impossible, it breaks it down to something more like not-*being*-with, or the passive movement of losing one’s self in the face –the ever-absenting face– of the other, which is why he actually told Bataille that the verb “dying” was more appropriate than the noun “death,” since it describes an unfinished and passive movement of loss.¹⁰

Some scholars (Bird, 2008; James, 2010; and Hole, 2013) assume that because Blanchot follows Levinas in stepping away from ontology his book also develops a Levinasian ethics. They claim that Nancy and Blanchot are polarized between prioritizing the Heideggerian “with” and the Levinasian concern with the “other” (Bird 3). This isn’t exactly the case: Nancy’s concern with the “with” is also a concern with the other, especially when he reflects on address and literature; and, as I argued previously, Blanchot takes many elements from Levinas but also claims independence from them, especially from instituting an ethical order in the unavowable community.

Bataille is at the center of this conversation because, according to Nancy, he “is without a doubt the one who experiences first, or most acutely, the modern experience of community as neither a work to be produced nor a lost communion, but rather as space itself, and the spacing of the experience of the outside, of the outside-of-self” (*TIC* 19). Nevertheless, it isn’t easy to determine whether Bataille renounces ontology himself. In *Inner Experience* (1943) he writes that what “one calls a ‘being’ is never simple (...) it is

¹⁰ Blanchot’s position was recently criticized in *The Disavowed Community*, where Nancy argues that the way Blanchot presents relationality in his reading of Duras’s short story is so negative that the possibility of relation vanishes in a sacrificial, Christian gesture. But the key to Blanchot’s reflection is the idea of *loss*, of a relationship through the absenting of beings, and not their absence, which, as Nancy constantly points out, would also be a form of immanence or communion.

undermined by its profound inner division, it remains poorly closed and, at certain points, open to attack from the outside” (96). This “inner division” is exactly what Nancy wants to develop as an originary *mit-sein*. But this is also the source of Blanchot’s position: he relates the “inner division” and the “attack from the outside” to the dying other, to the non-actualisable negativity that always renders life and living beings incomplete.

In his *Critical Introduction to Georges Bataille*, Benjamin Noys clarifies that for Bataille language discloses “the impossibility of an autonomous being, and it is language which places us in an impossible *relation* that we can never master. By placing us in relation language leads us into disorientation...(14-15). This is the disorientation that allows Blanchot and Nancy to read Bataille in two different directions. In truth, we cannot try to understand the deployment of the concept of community in either case without taking into account language, the literary and communication, which is exactly what draws me toward it.

1.3. COMMUNICATION AND ADDRESS

In *The Inoperative Community* and *The Unavowable Community* Blanchot and Nancy mainly refer to *Inner Experience*. In this book, Bataille resolutely takes language to the limit of the possible so that an “unmasterable relation” that he calls *communication* can take place. Here *communication* does not refer to a means of transmitting a message amongst subjects but to the very movement of address, understood as a *disorienting passage* in which “we are nothing, neither you nor I, beside the burning words that could pass from me to you, printed on the page” (IE 97). In line with theories of discourse, literature and poetics, Bataille sets the movement of address in between the sender and the destinatory; but the singularity of his reflection is that address disrupts their polarized and self-enclosed positions by exposing them to *nothing*: “the subject throws itself outside of itself, it ruins itself in an indefinite crowd of possible existences” (66); “I write for one, who, entering into my book, would fall into it as into a hole...” (117).

Theories of address focus on the author, the enunciating subject of the text and the identity of the destinatory, and regard address as a recourse or means of transmission, since it determines to whom someone is speaking. In *Theory of the Lyric* (2015) Jonathan Culler distinguishes three kinds of lyric address: address to listeners or readers; address to other people, specific individuals; and apostrophe. In *Poetry’s Touch: On Lyric Address* (2003),

William Waters explains that readers can be directly addressed; in the position of overhearing; or in the position of identifying with the speakers. None of these cases take into account the possible dislocation of the subjects: they revolve around an absent-present dichotomy and the idea of active and self-present writers and readers, to the extent in which they can reflect upon notions of intentionality (Culler) or reader answerability (Waters). Bataille's contribution to my thesis and to the reflection on community and literature that Nancy and Blanchot develop consists in taking address to the limit of the possible by developing "the relationship between author and reader as a community of finitudes" (Iyer 136), beyond the metaphysics of presence and the limits of the subject.

Thus, following Bataille's deployment of the term "communication" in *Inner Experience*, understood as a mutual yet irreciprocal exposure of/to nothing, Nancy says that "[f]initude itself *is* nothing, (...). But it appears, it presents itself, it exposes itself, and thus it *exists* as communication" (*TIC* 28). He also defines singularity as finitude: so if finitude only appears as communication, in the movement of address to the other, singularity is the sharing of singularities and the singular being is multiple. This involves a double movement of exposure and withdrawal. Exposing nothing: the limit and the appearance of the singular being. Nancy asserts that singularity has neither the nature nor the structure of individuality but rather takes place at the level of the *clinamen* (6-7). The finite being is thus always at the edge of itself and it "*co-appears* or *compears* (*comparaît*)" (28) when it communicates. Hence, Bataille's concept of communication helps Nancy develop an answer to his ontological task: to find a way of relating being-towards-death to being in common.

In "Myth Interrupted," one of the essays added to the 1986 version of *The Inoperative Community*, he explains that immanent communities have a mythical structure because they are produced by the self-founding narration of a communal destiny and origin. "This is what Schelling demands with his 'tautegory'. Myth signifies itself, and thereby converts its own fiction into foundation or into the inauguration of meaning itself" (53). The members of a community produce and reproduce the discourse it is founded upon and commune with the meaning created by the myth and which they are creating and created by. Thinking of community in these terms helps Nancy connect the critique of "community-as-unity" that I developed in the first section with literature: he claims that, as "the beneficiary (or the echo) of myth" (63), literature can expose the limit of the horizon of signification on which a myth is grounded.

“Literature interrupts myth by giving voice to being-in-common, which has no myth and cannot have one. Or since being-in-common is nowhere, and does not subsist in a mythic space that could be revealed to us, literature does not give it a voice: rather, it is being in common that is literary (or scriptuary)” (63-64). This is a key passage to understand Nancy’s approach to community, because he affirms that being-in-common *is* literary, and that the way in which literature relates to myth is interruption. Literature is thus not presented as what can produce and represent the discourse on which a myth is founded, but as what suspends and exposes its horizon of signification. Most importantly, Nancy announces that being-in-common happens *as* literature: as the exposure of an inscription: a word, a body, that is always finite, exposed and multiple.

At this literary limit, language no longer means anything, it loses its power to the extent in which the only thing left to be done is address others, expose finitude, *compear*.

Words do not “come out” of the throat (not from the “mind” “in” the head): they are formed in the mouth’s articulation. This is why speech –including silence– is not a means of communication but communication itself, an exposure. (...) The speaking mouth does not effect any bond; it is perhaps, though taken at its limit, (...) – the beating of a singular site against another singular site... (30-31)

Communication is presented as an articulated sharing and divide [*partage*] in which fusion is resisted (one singular sight *against* another). The articulation fastens singularities in the passageway of plurality. This is where the question of the literary and the question of community meet for Nancy: literature can open non-semantic passages that don’t communicate anything, only the articulation of finitude. This distinguishes the literary from other kinds of discourses which are not only “formed in the mouth’s articulation” but which serve a pre-existing order of signification, as if they were derived from a higher or more ideal order–this is what Nancy refers to above with the “mind” or the “head” (terms that also recall Derrida’s work on writing and the supplement). “Literary communism” only refers to the articulation in which nothing is exposed other than the limit of singular sites beating against one another.

In consequence, Nancy affirms that “the only sense proper to writing’s movement is that of the address of sense. In this address, sense is extended from one to the other or, more accurately, from one to all others...” (“Around the Notion”28). But for Nancy “sense does not entail that something be signified; rather, it entails the difficulty of saying. (...) It has sense only as an act of communication (...) that is

precisely *not* the transfer of information” (29). This event, which resists signification and transmission, is how the articulation of community takes place. It is a matter of address, of a movement of sending which doesn’t take place between two subjects but rather unworks these two subjects in the in-between space of the *sending* itself. This is where *the inoperative community* takes place; being-in-common *happens* in the in-between space of address.

Thinking about relationality through exteriority is also indebted to the way Bataille connects communication to ecstasy:

...ecstasy itself is communication, the negation of the isolated being who, at the same time as it disappears in that violent rupture, pretends to exalt or to enrich itself with what breaks its isolation by going as far as to opening itself up to the unlimited. (...) The isolated being is the individual... (IE 18)

Bataille raises two very important issues here: first, that communication negates the isolated being; second, that this negation is ecstatic and happens as a moment of rapture and rupture, outside the individual subject. Nancy traces the meaning of ecstasy, before Bataille, to Schelling and Heidegger: “Strictly speaking, it defines the impossibility (...) of absolute immanence (...) and consequently the impossibility either of an individuality in the precise sense of the term, or of a pure collective totality” (TIC 6). And then he adds: “one could not properly say that the singular being is the subject of ecstasy, for ecstasy has no ‘subject’ –but one must say that ecstasy (community) happens *to* the singular being” (6-7). The singular being is thus, for Nancy, the event of an opening of in-between space: the being that happens as it communicates by stepping outside of itself. In this light, communication is not a means for a message to be transmitted but an existential passageway.

In his recent book, *The Disavowed Community*, Nancy specifically stresses the importance of the connection Bataille makes between community and writing in this regard:

Bataille’s writing is thus the very site of sharing and “ecstasy” (that of being mortal, sharing mortality) which can only communicate itself and whose communication is the truth of community—in other words the truth of what cannot be “limited to a single individual” (...). For Bataille, that sense is essentially common and not isolated is more than a theme; it is an obsession, a fixation. Community and writing are both intertwined together. (18-19)

This is what puts him at the center of the discussion on community that Nancy opened in 80's. And this also is why literature, for Blanchot, is similar to the experience of dying, which he insistently claims that no one can go through alone. In fact, he establishes more than a parallelism between them. Where for Nancy being-in-common is literary, for Blanchot dying is; and the connection between literature and an unavowable community is that, like the experience of facing a dying other, literary address dispossesses the reader. It is a gift that no saying or reading can assume (Fynsk, "Perhaps Already" 153): "a gift of 'pure' loss that cannot make sure of ever being received by the other, even though the other is the only one to make it possible" (Blanchot, *TUC* 12).

In this sense, Blanchot's reflection also allows us to think of literary address from a position that transgresses the metaphysics of presence and that acknowledges that reception cannot be guaranteed; "[h]ence the foreboding that the community, in its very failure, is linked to a certain kind of writing, a writing that has nothing else to search for than the last words: 'Come, come you for whom the injunction, the prayer, the expectation is not appropriate'" (12). Blanchot characterizes the communitarian exigency as an address without symmetrical subjects of enunciation and reception; it's not that there is no other, but that the other, when confronted by the excess negativity of address, is no longer a fully present subject. Thus, he asks, rhetorically, what the pretension of a community can be "in its stubbornness to only keep of 'you and me' such relations of asymmetry that suspend the *tutoyement* [the familiar form of address]" (9-10)? It opens us to an *unfamiliar* address that squanders the subjects in movements of loss and institutes nothing.

Hence, Blanchot and Nancy have two different approaches to the sovereign exposure of nothing that Bataille calls communication. For Nancy the exposure of finitude between singularities occurs as an ontological affirmation of their being-in-common, and the nothing of community opens them to a primordial plurality. Address does not occur between a self-present subject of enunciation and a reader, but between two finite beings at the edge of themselves. The familiar form of address still applies in his case, understanding, as Paul Celan did, that "I am you when I I am" ("*Ich bin du wenn Ich Ich bin*"). In Blanchot's case, relationality happens through loss and separation, and the emphasis is not ontological. I will call it "erratic" since address happens like a "lapse in the logic of the universe," for it does not address anybody; instead, it dispossesses each person drawn to its appeal. When speaking about the role of address in Duras's *La*

Maladie de la Mort, Blanchot says that the “you” directed at the woman “never addresses her, it has no power over her who is indeterminate, unknown, unreal, thus ungraspable in her passivity, absent in her slumbering and eternally fleeting presence” (35). This is, in fact, the core of Blanchot's reflection on address: it's an empty address to the unknown other.

If the movement of dying radically separates the dying person from the friend who is with her, making their relationship unbearable, intolerable, and dissymmetrical, the reason literature can contest others in the way that dying does has to do with Blanchot's understanding of language, which can also be traced back to Bataille and which Blanchot also developed in his essays and readings of Mallarmé.¹¹ For Bataille, language is “perpetually and irreducibly double: it affirms the need for discourse, but it also bears witness to that which, within words themselves, remains unspoken, unspeakable, absolutely other” (Hill, *BKB*¹² 15). Language works and unworks. On one hand it has productive value and actualizes negativity in order to articulate discourse, which, following Kojève, he believed forms the bonds for projects. On the other hand, it also unleashes excess negativity. I will develop these two aspects right away in order to explain why Blanchot can relate literature to dying.

In Kojève's *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, the idea of culture is described as the product of the work of the negative and also of the idea of work as labor. “[I]t is in separating and in recombining things in and through his discursive thought [the work of the negative] that man forms his technical projects, which, once realized through work, really transform the aspect of the natural [and] given World by creating therein a World of culture” (39). The relationship between these two notions of work lets us see more clearly how Bataille's notion of expenditure and the attempt to unleash an unworking negativity relate to sovereignty: interrupting the work of the negative causes the bonds of projects to slacken, actuality cannot be articulated.

In relation to literature, Blanchot explains that culture “tends to conceive of and to establish as relations of unity relations that, on the basis of literature, give themselves as (...) irreducible to any unifying process. Culture works for the whole” (*The Infinite Conversation* 400). But a writer cannot *oppose* culture because every writer produces and is

¹¹ On Blanchot's reception of Mallarmé see: Hill, Leslie. “Blanchot and Mallarmé.” *Comparative Literature* 105.5, Johns Hopkins UP, 1990, pp.889-913.

¹² Abbreviation of: Hill, Leslie. *Bataille, Klossowski, Blanchot: Writing at the Limit*. Oxford University Press, 2001.

produced by culture (349). Not being able to free herself from this unifying tendency, the only way a writer suspends Culture—which, in Kojève’s view, is a negation of the negation—is through writing itself, because it unleashes a movement of withdrawal from within the work. This movement in which writing would elude itself is nothing that the writer can or knows how to do. This is where the excess negativity of language comes into play, for it suspends the unifying and dialectical tendencies of discourse. This is the second point I want to refer to.

Kojève, asserts that

Words have no natural relation with the objects they represent. To give a name is to establish a genus and to detach from the *hic et nunc* (...) This mediation and discovery through language requires mortal man, because only a being capable of imagining the removal of existence of this dog could be capable of forging the concept in excess of this possibility (its name). (Ryder 72-73)

The idea that naming almost mystically represents the removal of the existence of things and, therefore, that language could only have been conceived by mortals who are aware of death and dying, who are, themselves, exceeded by this absenting force and incompleteness, allows Bataille to connect language to the unworking excess negativity. Blanchot follows this path, building on the idea that language always begins “with a void; no fullness, no certainty can ever speak; something essential is lacking in anyone who expresses himself. Negation is tied to language” (“Literature and the Right to Death” 324). But in *The Unavowable Community* relationality becomes extremely important to bring this out. It is as if this excess negativity was nowhere else but in the address to the other, and its purpose was only this: to affirm their distance and their relationship through otherness.

In *Inner Experience* Bataille confesses that he could never go through the experience alone, that the subject in the experience “loses itself in human communication (...) if this crowd were absent, if the possible were dead, if I were... the last? Would I have to renounce leaving myself, remaining enclosed in this self as in the depths of a tomb” (65-66)? Blanchot emphasizes Bataille’s insistence on the impossibility of going through the experience alone (see *TUC* 17; 21-23), which is why his concept of communication—understood as the pure movement of address—is the focus of this discussion. The issue is that language always bears the possibility of impossibility, but this essential incompleteness only opens up when language is pushed to its limit at the

expense of negating its own (productive) value in the face the other. In *The Work of Fire* (1949), before Blanchot differentiated writing from speech (which he does only after reading Derrida's *Of Grammatology*), he wrote: "My speech is a warning that at this very moment death is loose in the world, that it has suddenly appeared between me, as I speak, and the being I address: it is there between us as the distance that separates us, but this distance is also what prevents us from being separated..." ("Literature and the Right to Death" 323-324).

In this respect, discourse is always cut across by an absence, but this absence affirms a calling. Thus, in this context address is not only a literary recourse that calls and determines the recipient of a message; it is also an affirmation of what makes sending possible in the first place; each inscription is oriented towards the outside and comes in the way of language and people coinciding with themselves. Negation, then, is tied to language, and writing allows us to see "what one doesn't normally see while speaking: that discourse, even negating its own value, assumes not only he who engages in it but he who listens to it... (...) Thus I speak, everything in me gives itself to others" (Bataille *IE* 129). Address is the unavowable excess of discourse.

The question is why the literary can expose this excess. A distinction Bataille makes in *Inner Experience* within poetry helps clarify this. In a way, he argues, poetry is sovereign and, in another, solely discursive. In the second case he describes it as a verbal project. It is not a calling to breakdown the isolated subject but part of the process of production and self-production. In this line of thought he declares that the "poetic (...) never dispossesses us entirely, because the words, the dissolved images, are charged with emotions already experienced, pinned to objects that link them to the known" (11). From this point of view, poetry is subjected to the realm of the self –charged with emotions and empirical knowledge. It does not dispossess us because it speaks *about* the world in which we live and which we recognize.

But there is a side of poetry that he also refers to as a "perversion" of discourse, because whilst the former forms the bonds for projects, investing negativity in activity, the latter suspends that process:

Words—we use them, we make of them the instruments of useful acts. (...) When words like *horse* or *butter* enter into a poem, they do so detached from interested concerns. For as many times as the words *butter* and *horse* are put to practical ends, the use that poetry makes of them liberates human life from these ends. (*IE* 135-136)

This statement connects the question of poetry to the unworking as developed in the first section. The issue is that, in poetry, words are not *consigned* to gain but loss; that they are not invested in activity in order to fulfill a project, or to represent and reproduce the discourse on which a community is based (which would correspond to the way in which language configures the mythic, as Nancy describes the role of discourse in immanent communities). Here language isn't subjected to a higher order that it would serve, like truth, for instance. This side of poetry coincides with the "second kind of writing" that Blanchot describes in the preface to *The Infinite Conversation* that I cited earlier. In this "uninterested" scenario, subjects, language and address are not bound to the dialectic of production, which is why another way of being in relation can happen.

In regard to the process of writing *Inner Experience*, Bataille confessed that he tolerated in himself "the action of the project in that it is a link with this obscure *other*, sharing my anguish, my torture, desiring my torture as much as I desire his" (65). In this statement lays the affirmation of the difference within each literary work and the duplicity of poetry. The issue is that the two sides coexist: work and unwork coincide only to guarantee that literature will never coincide with itself. This is what makes the literary (mis)encounter valuable to think about community for Blanchot. It renders unity, identity and completion impossible, unrealizable. Hence, following Bataille, Blanchot believes "that *oeuvre* and *désœuvrement* are in fact the same thing..." (Van Rooden 93).

The duplicity involved here is very similar to what we find in Juan Rulfo's *Pedro Páramo*, which I will use as an example. In this novel, Juan Preciado sets out to find his father in a city called Comala after his mother's death. This city is described as the "mouth of hell" because it's hot, full of echoes and of people who whisper mysteriously—later one finds out that everyone is dead. It's a ghost town, but Juan realizes this too late, when he has already given into the plurality of these voices and dies too. Nevertheless, the novel continues after he dies: it's not about him, but about Comala, which only exists through the voices and whispers of the dead who address Juan. When he realizes that no one is alive, Juan says: "The words I had heard up until then, I had not realized it before, had no sound, they did not sound; I could feel them, but soundless, like the words you hear in dreams" (Rulfo 52). The Mexican scholar, Fabianne Bradu, avers that the hell of Comala is one in which everything coexists and is annulled (53), but what we in fact find is that everything coexists *as* it is being annulled. This is why silence here is not a mere absence, quite the contrary: in order for it to exist

it has to be said (25). This is the murmuring movement that makes the novel *Pedro Páramo* possible; it is the roads, the walls and the rocks that build it.¹³ In words that should be more familiar to us by now, in order to be the singular novel that it is, this work is inseparable from the unworking disappearance and exposure of Comala's voices.

Leslie Hill has suggested that the difference between the two sides of poetry described by Bataille might depend on the kind of reading they demand (*BKB* 42); as if every poem or every work was open to productive and unworking readings. In the first case we would try to understand the meaning of the words, to decipher the metaphors, identify with a set of images and emotions. In the second, we would privilege the address, pay attention to what resists the configuration of meaning but also makes it possible, to the fact that we are being spoken to from a distance that we cannot overcome and that we cannot take in because, whether we know it or not, there is no longer an "in." "Poetic existence in me," writes Bataille, "addresses itself to poetic existence in others, and it is a paradox, undoubtedly, if I expect from my fellows, drunk with poetry, that which I wouldn't expect knowing them to be lucid" (117-118).

In *The Unavowable Community* Blanchot goes as far as to define reading as "the unworking labor of the work," which at times belongs "to the vertigo of drunkenness" (22). This is coherent with the particularity of the reflection on unreserved negativity in this text, which is that it is only exposed in the face of another. In this context, then, the unworking is released by address and affirmed by the impossibility of reading, where otherness and distance come in the way of understanding and receiving. The emphasis on drunkenness that Blanchot recovers from Bataille stresses a certain disposition of the reader to give herself over to the forces of destruction and abandonment, which, in reading, require nothing more than passivity or not-doing. "This not-doing is one of the aspects of the unworking, and friendship, with the reading in drunkenness, is the very form of the 'unworking community' Jean-Luc Nancy has asked us to reflect upon" (*TUC* 23). Hence, an unworking community *needs* the reader not to work.

Something is expected of the readers, who are not free in regard to what they read (23); the reader is "desired, loved, and perhaps intolerable. (...) He is a companion who gives himself over to abandonment, who is himself lost..." (23). The reader also

¹³ "This village is full of echoes. It's as if they had been locked into the empty spaces of walls or under the rocks. When you walk, it feels like they are following you. You hear creaks. Laughter. Very old laughs, as if they were tired of laughing" (my translation). "Este pueblo está lleno de ecos. Tal parece que estuvieran encerrados en el hueco de las paredes o debajo de las piedras. Cuando caminas, sientes que te van pisando los pasos. Oyes crujidos. Risas. Unas risas ya muy viejas, como cansadas de reír" (Rulfo 45).

offers herself to the work, which cannot tolerate her in the same way that she cannot tolerate the work's withdrawal. Because of this, Blanchot recalls a declaration by Bataille in which he says that the person for whom he writes is precisely the person that he cannot know "and the relationship with the unknown, even in writing, exposes me to death and finitude" (24).

Nancy, on the other hand, struggles with the problem of the unworking of the work. In *The Disavowed Community* he admits that

The Inoperative Community sought to dissociate the idea of 'community' from all projection into a work that is made or to be made—a State, a Nation, a People, or The People (...). It is true that this perceptive led me to neglect what Blanchot recalls in the last line of his book—that there is only unworking from out of the work. (72)

He is not admitting to a slight misinterpretation but to a major difference in the concept that he includes in the title of the book: the unworking. The acknowledgement of this misunderstanding is relevant because it stresses that his focus on literature has less to do with the fact that it is *always a work of language* (in the sense that Bataille and Blanchot understand language's relation to negation), and more to do with the emphasis made by Bataille on the interruption of the dialectic process of production (the difference between the words "unavowable" and "the unworking" included in their titles is representative of this scenario).

In "Myth Interrupted" Nancy stresses that the difference between a myth and literature is that the latter doesn't come to an end. The reason: the relationship between address and literature's ontological indetermination:

Literature does not come to an end at the place where the work passes from an author to a reader, and from this reader to another reader or to another author. It does not come to an end at the place where the work passes on to another work by the same author or at the place where it passes into other works of other authors. It does not come to an end where its narrative passes into other narratives, its poem into other poems (...) It is unended and unending—in the active sense—in that it is literature. And it is literature if it is speech (a language, an idiom, a writing)—whatever kind of speech it may be, written or not, fictive or discursive, literature or not—that puts into play nothing other than being *in common*. (*TIC* 65)

This passage, albeit repetitive, makes its point precisely by repetition or, rather, iterability: literature is passed on and on, in singular encounters which, nonetheless,

expose the limits of singularity, making room for the illegible and exposing being-in-common. There is not a complex philosophy of language underlying Nancy's approach; literature is simply not the text as such, but the unending movement of sending that makes the text possible in the first place. "We would not write," he affirms, "if our being were not shared" (*TIC* 69). This doesn't mean that we write about a common being, but that literature is the very movement of being-in-common: the exposure of nothing that makes singularities appear and withdraw. This implies that the text and its reception aren't *completely* bound to the possible, that the multiplicity of address also involves the impossibility of completion, identity and unity.

By drawing a connection between literature and ontology Nancy is able to find a way around the immanence of community, because what literature "communicates is the following: that singular beings are never founding, originary figures for one another, never places or powers of remainderless identification" (*TIC* 79). In this way, Nancy also answers Bataille's calling, showing that there is no autonomous subject and proposing a way to think of who we are, and who we are when we are together, that does not negate the excess negativity of dying: "Community does not sublate the finitude it exposes. Community itself, in sum, is nothing but this exposition." (26)

In regard to the roles of the author and the reader, Nancy shows us that every act of writing is also an act of reading; that the author has always been a reader, and that they are both caught up in a movement of address that exceeds them—individually and ontologically. Accordingly, Nancy believes that readers must expose themselves to the literary, not impose themselves on the text. This demands something of the reader too: to listen to the interruption, to look out for the multiplicity that comes in the way of literature coinciding with itself: "[t]he text interrupts itself when it shares itself out—at every moment to you, from him or her to you, to me, to them" (65). And to pass it on.

In a private seminar I attended in Strasbourg with Nancy on these two books, he had this in mind when he spoke about the ideal novel that he would write:

A myth has an end: when the *Iliad* concludes the Greeks come back home, and in *The Odyssey* Ulysses returns and everything is completed. An incomplete or unfinished myth is a novel or a story. I frequently dream about writing a novel with many ends, each one would be a way of not ending. (54)¹⁴

¹⁴ I am citing the transcript of a private seminar held in 2013 with J.L. Nancy and the research Group on Law and Violence, of which I am a member. We are currently co-editing the transcripts (*Conversations on*

Perhaps he spoke without meditating too much about what he was saying, because the *Odyssey* and the *Iliad* are also literature, and his writing on literature doesn't really develop a theory of the epic, the novel or of literary genres. Moreover, the history of the production and circulation of the *Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, and the way they have been received, rewritten and transformed in time definitely affirm the unending multiplicity that Nancy describes in *The Inoperative Community*. However, his desire to write a novel with many ends illustrates his difference with Blanchot.

Blanchot's understanding of the duplicity of language –working and unworking– doesn't necessarily need a novel to have multiple ends. Any work of literature can give and be given-to the unworking. Oddly, this is also the case for Nancy, but the difference is that Nancy doesn't see this happening in the text itself unless it's literally interrupted, like his dream novel or, for instance, Julio Cortázar's *Hopscotch*. His desire to write a novel with many endings is a desire to seek an alternative to the unity of the Book (one can almost picture a fan of small book flaps loosely hanging off a book's back cover). Blanchot, however, can even relate these epic texts to the working-unworking simultaneity.

In a passage from *The Infinite Conversation* he writes:

Everything, in fact, begins in a way as it does in the *Iliad*, with an invocation of the Muse, a call to voice and the desire to give oneself over to this speech of the outside that speaks everywhere (...) Between this being (...) and the anonymous voice, there are established relations that in their laughable insignificance are more important than the various peripeteia of the story. (329)

For Bataille and Blanchot even myth unleashes worklessness: the work is tolerated because it is the only way to make room for the Outside: the mermaids' song, the multiple and effacing voices of the Muse of the *Illiad*. Leslie Hill has stated that Blanchot's "project is to bring to light (...) the syntax of fundamental paradox and of unresolvable duplicity" that "'makes literature possible, while simultaneously and necessarily depriving it of a secure foundation and of any stable or determinate relation with being or truth'" (Hill, *BKB* 890). This is what allows literature to be a site for *communism beyond communism*. Like Blanchot, for Nancy literature also interrupts secure

Community, Memory and Political Action) with members of the group who are now at different institutions like DePaul University, Cornell University, La Universidad de Los Andes and the University of Warwick. The group was founded in Bogotá by Prof. María del Rosario Acosta, currently an Associate Professor at DePaul University in Chicago.

foundations and unworks processes of production and completion; but he doesn't acknowledge the "unresolvable duplicity" that Blanchot and Bataille ascribe to it.

The different ways in which Nancy and Blanchot read Bataille permeates their approach to literature and to the "subjects" of a finite community. I believe their two positions can contribute to the fields of poetics and literary theory with a conceptual framework to think openly and thoroughly about forms of literary address and reception that involve experiences of illegibility, a strong awareness of finitude, and a desire to engage and communicate with readers in ways that cannot be limited to the transmission of information, the exchange and coproduction of meaning, and recognition. This is exactly why the discussion on "literary communism" is very useful to analyze the poetic structures of address in Dickinson and Celan.

Dickinson's poems are inclined to illegibility and devoted to the loss of the subjects surrounding the poetic event (the author, the lyrical subjects and the reader). Celan's poetry is well known for opening the poem to an "essential darkness" that cannot be overcome by the reader or even the author, who, as I will argue, is also presented by Celan as a reader. In both cases finitude is exposed and experienced as a limit, opening literary address to different forms of relationships than those it is usually limited to. Hence, the reflection on "communication" undertaken by Nancy and Blanchot strongly contributes to clarify and think through the two poets' renunciation to power and completeness. For the poets and the philosophers, reading and writing are events that involve the exposure of finitude and give way to unworking relationships.

In *Inner Experience* Bataille, at times, refers directly to poetry, but Blanchot and Nancy don't. Blanchot's text provides a close reading of Duras's short story and Nancy makes clear that literature concerns most ways of writing wherever an unworking address is endlessly at stake. By bringing their discussion into the field of poetics I am reconnecting their reflection to a genre that originally played a role in the ideas that led to *The Inoperative Community* and *The Unavowable Community*.¹⁵

As a whole, and in spite of their differences, the discussion between Blanchot and Nancy helps us approach literature differently: not with the question of *what* it communicates or expresses, but rather with the affirmation *that* it communicates, addresses. If we decide to listen beyond the transmitted message, we encounter

¹⁵ I am referring to Bataille's comments on poetry, which I quoted earlier.

difference and incompleteness—a finite community; an opening to other possibilities of reading and listening to one another.

2. A Poetics of Loss

Emily Dickinson was born in Amherst, Massachusetts in 1830. When she was thirty-three years old and at the peak of her poetic production, she wrote a poem that closes with the following stanza: “You cannot fold a Flood – /And put it in a Drawer – / Because the Winds would find it out – /And tell your Cedar floor –” (F583 M266).¹⁶ With these lines I want to start tracing my route into the work of a poet on whom many winds have told. The image of a flood accurately describes her writing practice, not only because of its magnitude and uncontrollable force, but also because of its relationship to destruction and waste. But Dickinson’s flood can be folded: it’s written on paper.¹⁷ Because of this, her life and overflowing work have everything to do with drawers, pockets, envelopes, and seals.

In this chapter I will show how many of Dickinson’s poems are unworked by their formats of inscription and strategies of address, which affirm finitude and incompleteness. They introduce the subjects involved in the poetic event, such as the lyrical subjects and the readers they address, in mutual movements of loss. Therefore, my approach explores further the question of unworking communication, which I presented in the last chapter, and is useful for two different reasons: in order to study Dickinson’s work with a concept (the unworking) that invites us to think about her writing practice in a new and necessary way, and in order to take the theoretical discussion between Blanchot and Nancy a step further by seeing how the movement of unworking address occurs in the poetic event itself. This chapter sets the stage for the comparative relationship between Dickinson’s work and Blanchot’s approach to literature that I develop in chapter four. For now, I will present her work independently, but from an angle that will make the comparison relevant.

This chapter has three parts: “The Chaff and the Wheat,” “Let’s Get Lost” and “A Poetics of Incompleteness.” The first section undertakes a double task: it modulates an introduction to the poet’s life and writing practices by reflecting on the way her

¹⁶ I will quote the Franklin poem numbers and the Miller edition page numbers to reference Dickinson’s poems when the first line of each poem is not mentioned, if it is I will only quote the Miller edition page number.

¹⁷ In a letter to Susan Gilbert she writes: “Susie, what should I do – there isn’t room enough, not *half* enough, to hold what I was going to say. Won’t you tell the man who makes sheets of paper, that I haven’t the *slightest respect for him*” (L44 184)! The italicized “half” highlights the emphasis on folds and pieces of paper that will be present in my reflection. I will reference her letters with the number of the letter followed by the page number of the Harvard 1958 edition.

writing transgresses the logic behind what we normally call a “complete work” or “*oeuvre*.” She carries out this transgression in a similar manner to how Bataille and Blanchot describe that literature unworks projects, in the sense that a work is needed in order to be unworked. The specificity of the unworking in Dickinson’s case is that she consciously transgressed the idea of a project and a product through an economic approach in which she paradoxically *consigned* her work to loss and powerlessness instead of profit and power. In the first section we’ll see that this is done through formats of inscription which defy the unity of the book; in the second, we’ll see that loss and expenditure are also at the core of her structure of address.¹⁸

For about the last twenty years, scholars have focused their attention on Dickinson’s figures of address. *Dickinson and Audience* (1996) gathers the work of scholars who, among other issues, have acknowledged the originality of this aspect in her work, e.g. David Porter, Richard B. Sewall, Martin Orzeck, Robert Weisbuch, and Virginia Jackson. These authors discussed the experimental ways in which her poems address, construct and alienate readers, as they break away from a tradition of lyric subjectivity and expressivity by different means and strategies. Most of these perspectives ultimately center Dickinson’s poetics of reception around notions of intersubjectivity and intersubjective meaning making, or on the compensation of absence (of the reader and the poet) through the presence of language or of a spiritual essence—thus, a poetics of compensation. I will dialogue with their essays throughout the chapter because, along with Jed Deppman, I recognize in Dickinson’s work “a preexisting suspicion about the metaphysics of presence” (*Trying to Think with E.D.* 13). Hence, I want to make my way into this ongoing discussion by claiming that many of her poems answer to another logic: not one of self-present subjects, recognition, and the appropriation of absolute

¹⁸ The catalogue of the 2017 exhibit *The Networked Recluse. The Connected World of Emily Dickinson* held at the Morgan Library & Museum includes a reprint of the essay “Sumptuous Destitution” by Richard Wilbur, which appeared originally in 1960 as a contribution to *Emily Dickinson; Three Views* (Amherst College Press). He presents Dickinson as a poet inclined to loss and failure who argues for “the *superiority* of defeat to victory, of frustration to satisfaction, and of anguished comprehension to mere possession” (117). Even though his reflection is limited by the idea of “superiority” which turns loss into a gain, I think that his reflection was recovered for this catalogue, which includes essays by transgressive Dickinson thinkers like Susan Howe and Marta Werner, because of his insistence on Dickinson’s inclination to loss and emptiness, which he develops in regard to her notion of desire and use of biblical references. He argues that “the objects of her desire” are not only distant, “they are also very often moving away, their sweetness increasing in proportion to their remoteness. ‘To disappear enhances,’ one of the poems begins...” (119). In regard to her use of biblical references he affirms that Dickinson referred to heaven as a spatial metaphor. “‘Heaven,’ she said, ‘is what I cannot reach’” (119), “an infinitely remote blank” (121). I will return to this later.

meaning, but rather to a way of relating to others and of reading that is based on separation, powerlessness, deferral, and non-recognition.

These poems are not and cannot be inclined to intersubjectivity precisely because they set up a relation with the reader that displaces subjectivity and the idea of the complete subject. The recent compilation, *Emily Dickinson and Philosophy* (2013), includes an illuminating paper by Megan Craig that analyzes the vulnerability and dissolution of the subjects and voices in Dickinson's poems. But the paper treats this problem only thematically, as if each poem were a closed universe. One of my objectives is to show that vulnerability and dissolution don't only affect the subjects within Dickinson's poems, as Craig impressively argues, but that they are written into the poems' strategies of address; into the relationship between each poem and its reader.

This chapter explores two scenarios in which I argue that Dickinson's poetry principally deals with loss and incompleteness: epistolary writing and when a person is faced with somebody else's death, a moment in which communication takes the form of a spacing rather than the articulation of a message that could be shared. In the second section I'll interweave both scenarios to show that Dickinson articulates an unworking relationship between address and finitude that leads her to develop an original and transgressive poetics of reception.

In order to study the relationship between the structure of epistolary correspondence and finitude, Jacques Derrida's *The Post Card* has been an extremely useful source, especially because his theory of writing also renounces and denounces the metaphysics of presence. The first section of the book, entitled "*Envois*," focuses on everything that is at stake in sending a postcard, such as the chances and risks of arrival, the processes and institutions involved in sending (e.g. the post office, the courier, the stamps, etc.) and the very notion of destination, which he recalls (as an addressee of Kant and Heidegger) "includes analytically the idea of death, like a predicate (P) included in the subject (S) of destination, the addressee or the addressor" (33). Dickinson's structure of address, in its relation with death, opens similar questions. Her letters have been studied extensively as has her constant writing about death, but the relationship between these aspects and her poetic structure of address has not.¹⁹

¹⁹ For a study that highlights the contemporary philosophical value of Dickinson's reflections on death, and their resistance to the metaphysics of presence, see Jed Deppman's chapter: "With Bolder Playmates Straying: Dickinson Thinking of Death." *Thinking with Emily Dickinson*. University of Massachusetts Press, 2008, pp.184-204.

William Decker comes close to doing this in “A Letter Always Seemed to Me Like Immortality: The Correspondence of Emily Dickinson,” where he argues that Dickinson’s letter writing “derives from a state of bereavement that is reconfirmed in the act of writing to those whose bodily presence is, for whatever reason, withheld...” (169). Nevertheless, he ends up asserting that her persistent writing practice “asserts the compensatory value of language” (175). An unworking understanding of poetic address, like the one I will argue Dickinson developed, can’t have compensatory value because it does not seek to compensate absence with presence; instead, devoted to loss, it releases unreserved negativity.

The third and final section of this chapter provides a close reading of the poem “Going to Her! Happy Letter.” I suggest we treat this poem as an *ars poetica*, because it reveals and affirms the drives and strategies of Dickinson’s poetics of incompleteness. More importantly, it reflects performatively on the way the drives of epistolary correspondence converge with an understanding of communication that exposes finitude.

Since I’m mostly interested in understanding her strategies of address rather than the poems’ content, I want to clarify that the way I approach her work is closer to poetics than hermeneutics according to a distinction drawn by Jonathan Culler:

Given a text, hermeneutics wants to find the meaning. This may involve a wide range of activities, from biographical criticism, which seeks to discover what the author might have meant, to symptomatic readings which engage the work through an interpretative language, whether humanist, Marxist, psychoanalytic (...) Poetics works in the opposite direction, asking what are the conventions that enable this work to have the sorts of meaning and effect it does for readers. (*Theory of the Lyric* 6)

My reflection isn’t centered on finding the meaning of Dickinson’s poems or solely on identifying some of the conventions that underlie the very possibility of meaning making, which Dickinson defies. I’m also interested in the poetic strategies that make meaning withdraw and in the way many of her poems call the reader to come and not come at the same time. Poetics, then, but focused on the unworking drives of the work.

2.1. THE CHAFF AND THE WHEAT

“Butterflies from St Domingo
Cruising round the purple line –
Have a system of aesthetics –
Far superior to mine.”

—Dickinson

As I mentioned earlier, Dickinson’s work is comparable to the magnitude and uncontrollable force of a flood. In an essay included in *The Gorgeous Nothings* (2013), the beautiful edition of the manuscripts of Dickinson’s envelope writings, Jen Bervin recalls that she wrote a total of 3,507 pieces before she died at age fifty-five. This includes “approximately 1,800 distinct poems within 2,357 poem drafts and at least 1,150 letters” (8). Many of the poems she wrote between 1858 and 1864 were stitched together by the poet herself in homemade notebooks that are now known as fascicles, a term coined in 1890 by their first editor, Mabel Loomis Todd. It was Dickinson’s younger sister, Lavinia, who found the forty fascicles along with “nearly four hundred poems arranged in the manner of the booklets, but unbound [referred to as ‘sets’]; miscellaneous fair copies; semifinal drafts; and worksheet drafts written on odds and ends of paper—the backs of envelopes and discarded letters, bits of wrapping paper, and edges of newspapers” (Huff 1). In this sense, it was Lavinia who opened the drawer in which an unmasterable flood was folded and kept.

It was no secret that Dickinson wrote poetry and that she did it well. Her friends and family knew this, as well as her epistolary correspondents: she frequently embedded poems in letters, and some of the letters were themselves highly poetic. This has led scholars and poets to regard her as one of the first American poets to challenge the distinction between prose and poetry.²⁰ Many of her correspondents were prominent intellectual figures of the time. Among these was the well-known literary critic Thomas W. Higginson, who collaborated in the *Atlantic Monthly* (founded in Boston in 1857). Dickinson initially reached out to him to seek feedback on her poems; in these letters she portrayed herself as a much less disciplined poet than she actually was. Another important intellectual who knew she was a poet and read her work was Helen Hunt Jackson, who wrote poetry, novels and essays, and actively denounced the injustices

²⁰ See Jack Spicer’s essay on Dickinson included in *The House That Jack Built*, where he writes: “The reason for the difficulty of drawing a line between the prose and poetry in Emily Dickinson’s letters may be that she did not wish such a line to be drawn” (234).

experienced by Native Americans. Jackson even published the few poems Dickinson allowed her to.²¹ Thus, the surprise wasn't that she wrote but how much she wrote, how she wrote, on what material surfaces and in what (dis)order.

The uncontrollable force that Lavinia's findings unleashed has to do with the structure or system that articulates her body of work and with the very idea of the work (*oeuvre*) itself. The different formats of the findings and even the different variations of poems and the different versions and possibilities of words annotated on each of them suggest that "Dickinson's poetry was not written *for* a printed medium, even though it was written *in* an age of print..." (McGann cited by Bervin 11). This is because the incorporation of her poems into a printed medium necessarily implies their transformation. In other words, the processes by which her manuscripts are given the unity of a book, with editorial interests of commerce and diffusion that respond to how we are used to reading and consuming poetry, turn her poems into products that do not resemble their manuscript version.

Since the 80's, Susan Howe has been committed to showing how these processes hinder the reception and acknowledgement of Dickinson's transgressive writing practice and, more importantly, how this writing practice challenged the literary institution. "During her lifetime," Howe writes, "this writer refused to collaborate with the institutions of publishing. When she created herself author, editor, and publisher, she situated her production in a field of free transgressive predisccovery" (*The Birth-mark* 147). To get an idea of how complex this is, Virginia Jackson acutely signals a paradox in regard to the editors' task. To begin, she quotes Dickinson's manuscript, variorum and reading editions editor Ralph W. Franklin: the poem "Those Fair - Fictitious - People" (now F369) exists in a semi-final draft with 26 suggestions that fit eleven places in the poem. From this, 7680 poems are possible – not versions, but according to our critical principles, poems'." And then she signals the paradox:

As an aspiring critic Franklin could see that a reading of Dickinson in manuscript is mathematically impossible; as an editor, he needed to take the poem out of its scriptive context in order to make a reading possible. (...) Franklin's editorial decision on a single Dickinson-Franklin lyric would have been impossible according to Franklin-the-critic... (*Dickinson's Misery* 38)

²¹ A total of eleven poems were published during Dickinson's lifetime.

Like Victor Frankenstein, her editors put together a body of a work that is actually dismembered. Jackson is absolutely right to stress that the poems, as published by Franklin, are not a Dickinson lyric, but a Dickinson-Franklin lyric. Why are the variations not considered part of the poem? Why do his critical principles determine what we read? The incorporation of Dickinson's work in the institution of literature is the founding fiction of her *oeuvre*.

At the beginning of *My Emily Dickinson*, Howe relates Dickinson to Gertrude Stein on the account that they both “conducted a skillful and ironic investigation of patriarchal authority over literary history. (...) In very different ways the countermovement of these two women's work penetrates to the indefinite limits of written communication” (12). She is referring specifically to the logic within poems themselves as exemplified by grammar, parts of speech, connection and connotation (12). Nonetheless, this is also the case of Dickinson's disjointed *oeuvre*. By breaking the ideal unity of a finished poem and book—and even the idea of the “final” version itself—it transgresses the format of poetry that the patriarchal, literary institution has historically and culturally promoted. Dickinson's writing challenges the vigilant authority that controls the “order which is shut inside the structure of a sentence” (12) as well as, at a larger scale, the system that encloses, distributes, invests in, gains from, selects and defines a literary project.

In the article, “A Poet without a Project? A Poetry without Scope or Structure?” Gary Lee Stonum refers to David Porter's *Modern Idiom*, a book in which Porter

...accuses Dickinson of artistic irresponsibility for neglecting to publish, for neglecting to delete the chaff from the wheat in her work, for neglecting to title her poems and thus signal even the nominal finality and the minimal impress of authorial control that titles can supply, for neglecting to define or even broach an *ars poetica*, for neglecting to attempt the magnitude of a sustained poem (much less a deliberate *chef d'oeuvre*), for neglecting in any other way to rank her poems according to centrality of importance, for neglecting to develop or advance during the course of her career, and most of all for neglecting to provide any cumulative wholeness to the body of her work. (Stonum 509)

These accusations are significant because they accurately describe the literary institution's order at the same time that they point to what I believe are the poet's strengths.²²

²² In *Modern Idiom*, David Porter lucidly explores Dickinson's poetics of incompleteness in the context of her loose writings and the incomplete poems she included in the fascicles. He actually describes the way

Indeed, Dickinson didn't "delete the chaff from the wheat" but, if the wheat is the profitable product, one mustn't be afraid to consider her *oeuvre* as a "chaff-poetics," for it renounces the commercial values of interest and gain achieved through publication as well as, in many of her poems, the consumer-friendly final draft. It might sound disdainful to say that an impressive body of work like Dickinson's is chaff, but this is because our understanding of value has been influenced by the idea of profit, and because our idea of literature has been shaped around the notion of the whole. Under the influence of these constructs Bervin prefers to call the poet's fragmentary writings "atoms" or "pieces of small fabric" rather than "scraps" (8), but the idea of the atom implies a monadic self-identity that Dickinson's writing practice shatters. Moreover, if we refer to her poems as chaff or scraps we stress the singular way in which her manuscripts' incompleteness question our understanding of value, and the language of value, in the light of literary commerce.

Porter also stresses the absence of titles in her poetry and interprets it as a renunciation of authorial control. In an essay on Kafka's famous parable, Derrida introduces a reflection on the concept of titles in relation to the literary institution that Porter doesn't manage to fit Dickinson into:

The title is usually chosen by the author or by his or her editorial representatives whose property it is. The title names and guarantees the identity, the unity and the boundaries of the original work which it entitles. It is self-evident that the power and import of a title have an essential relationship with something like the law, regardless of whether we are dealing with titles in general or with the specific title of a work, literary or not. ("Before the Law" 188-189)

From this point of view Porter is absolutely right when he relates the absence of the titles with a lack of authorial control. By not giving a title to her fascicles, by not binding all of her work together and naming it, Dickinson loses control over her work. In a letter

Dickinson resists the literary institution extremely accurately. The problem is that he deems this incompleteness as a "startling disability" caused by a separation between reality and language that he ascribes to Dickinson's lack of life experience (153)! He thus considers completeness something Dickinson was psychologically and socially incapable of and uninterested in: "I propose that the lack of architecture in individual poems, itself the result of the lack of an encompassing poetic design, comes from the absence of an abiding, life-centering angle of vision in the poet's mind" (144). This argument is very problematic as it seeks to explain the poet's experimental side precisely from a position or order that her writing transgresses. Another problem is that Porter's argument is based on the miscomprehension that Dickinson was extremely isolated and wasn't in contact or aware of her socio-political context, a common misrepresentation that Howe has sought to reconsider in *My Emily Dickinson* and her recently curated exhibit *A Networked Recluse*.

to Higginson in 1862, she wrote: “I had no Monarch in my life, and cannot rule myself, and when I try to organize my little Force explodes” (L271 414). There is powerlessness involved in her experience of *organization*. The type of power she can’t impose on herself is that of a ruler who needs to govern and give order to her kingdom or, in this case, to a work. Thus, what Lavinia Dickinson encountered after the poet’s death was literary anarchy: “The mob within the heart / Police cannot suppress / (...) / Uncertified of scene / Or signified of sound / But growing like a hurricane/ In a congenial ground” (M683).

This disorder and lack of authorial control sustains a principle of incompleteness that resists the ideas of the whole and the center that the literary institution cannot handle (it can handle the “atom” but not the “scrap”).²³ This is the reason why to process and circulate her work it has to be transformed into a project; some editions organize the poems chronologically, others thematically, and most of them include an index in which the first line of each verse replaces the title. Of course, these aspects are all unified by and dependent on the book’s title, which every edition has. Porter stands as a representative of this institution when he accuses her of neglect; I argue that she defies it.²⁴

In Richard Sewall’s biography of the poet, he relates the fact that she wrote on scraps of every kind of paper she could find to the inheritance of the frugality of New Englanders:

New Englanders were understandably frugal with everything, until frugality became a virtue which in later, more prosperous generations was cherished for its own sake, quite apart from need. Emily Dickinson wrote her poems, thriftily, on odds and ends of

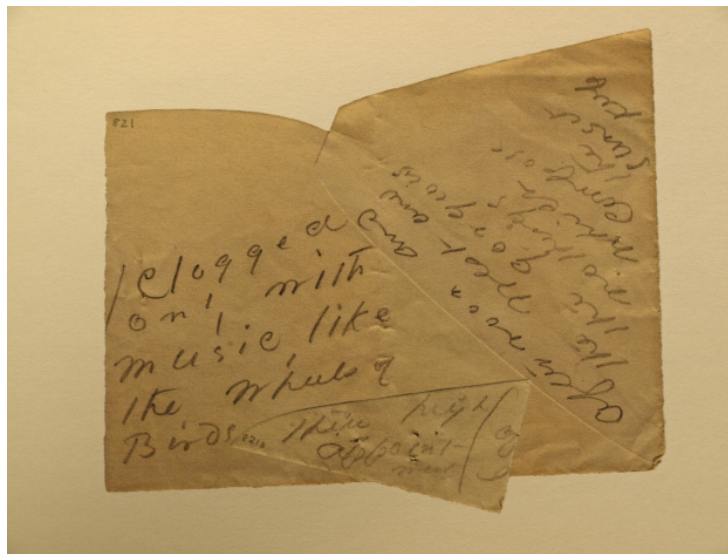
²³ Porter himself attributes this to a “disability” instead of a deliberate transgression: “she was unable to recognize the definiteness involved in putting a title to a poem” (185).

²⁴ Dickinson’s fascicles present the way in which she might have chosen to organize and systematize her work. However, it is surprising that only in 2016 was an attempt made, by Cristanne Miller and The Belknap Press of Harvard University, to publish the poems as she preserved them –bound and unbound. In the introduction, Miller informs us that “Dickinson may have ordered the poems in the forty fascicles to develop a particular theme or idea. Or she may have constructed these booklets to create some order among the poems she had accumulated by the time she was twenty-seven, in 1858, when she apparently began this systematic copying: after copying a poem, she discarded previous copies” (1). Nevertheless, even the fascicles are open to incompleteness, for Dickinson circulated variant versions of poems included in the fascicles and also “revised fascicle poems by writing in margins or between lines, sometimes cancelling her first choice” (5). From the second fascicle on she also added alternative words at the same time that she copied the poems even though “including alternatives (...) was not a constant practice; well over half of Dickinson’s poems contain no alternative words...” (5). For an in depth study of the structure, openness and relations of and within the fascicles see: Cameron, Sharon. *Choosing Not Choosing: Dickinson’s Fascicles*. University of Chicago Press, 1992.

papers, on the back of receipts, invitations, shopping lists, clippings, while her father drove the finest horse in town. (21)

Sewall is probably telling us the truth about New Englanders, but to believe that Dickinson chose to write on these odds and ends of papers only out of frugality dismisses the depth and transgressive nature of the relationship between material, form, and content that surprises us when we confront her manuscripts.

Even though they never read each other, Dickinson's writing practice is physically and spatially as experimental as Mallarmé's, who was nineteen years younger. Her tendency to write and fold letters to slip them into envelopes, and to fold, cut, and unfold envelopes and paper all show a similar fascination to his. In "The Book: A Spiritual Instrument," Mallarmé compares the plain sheets of newspapers to the gleaming folds of books: "...were it not for the folding of the paper and the depths thereby established, that darkness scattered about in the form of black characters could not rise and issue forth in gleams of mystery from the page to which we are about to turn" (26). If we look at her manuscripts, mainly the envelope ones, we see that Dickinson also explored the way folds interact with the poems' lines and characters—she even cut and joined paper together to make them. Perhaps the most experimental envelope writing is especially meaningful in this regard:



821.Left Wing: "Clogged / only with / Music, like / the Wheels of / Birds" Right Wing: "Afternoon and / the West and / the gorgeous / nothings / which /compose / the sunset / keep" 821A.Smaller, pinned wing: their high / Appoint / ment" (*The Gorgeous Nothings* 173)

Marta Werner, who found this collage manuscript in the Amherst College Library, describes what it displays as the “hidden visual rhyme of its wings and a blurred message about a sudden atmospheric convergence” (“Itineraries of Escape” 200). Werner’s use of the concept of rhyme in this particular circumstance is suggestive because it connects the words and the material surface through sound. Not only does the physical contour of the envelope (the folds, linings and juxtaposition of its parts) determine the direction of the poem’s theme and script, but also the words, letters, punctuation marks and blank spaces mobilize the paper on which it is inscribed. In the same essay I previously quoted, Mallarmé states that a book is of no avail without its folds, which are “like wings in repose, ready to fly forth again (...) and which constitute its rhythm and the chief reason for the secret contained in the pages” (26). Dickinson distils the folds from the idea of the book²⁵ and, in such a way, the bird’s wheels, its wings, are both surface and scripture. All the poem needs to reach the sky and attend the *high appointment* is one single flap, which is made possible by reading into the logic of the sonorous and visual rhyme:

To access the text(s), and to answer the question of where we have arrived, we must enter into a volitional relationship with the fragment, turning it point by point, like a compass or pinwheel. (...) As we rotate A 821 orienting and disorienting it at once, day and night—each of the whirl words—almost collide in the missing spaces just beyond the light seams showing the bifurcation in the envelope, and then fly apart in a synaesthesia of sight and sound. (Werner, “Itineraries of Escape” 200)

Here Werner points out that this could be more than one text because a slight variation in handwriting suggests they were composed on different occasions (200), but the fact is that it was found like this: stitched together in the form wings. And it demands a reader who is willing to turn the compass and let her senses be rattled—a mode of reading which claims for an experimental format, almost like *The Gorgeous Nothings* which looks, weighs and is designed more as an art book than a literary one, but which still doesn’t let us spin the manuscripts around. This envelope writing bears no sign of neglect, as Porter claims. On the contrary, it has been carefully stitched in a way that demands a different type of reading, and a different way of making it public which hasn’t been resolved.²⁶

²⁵ Nonetheless, we must keep in mind that she did bind the fascicles together in a book-like fashion, which scholars like Jackson and Howe interpret as a form of self-publication that destabilizes the boundaries between the public and the private.

²⁶ Miller, however, says the following in regard to this kind of approach: “Some scholars believe that Dickinson composed with attention not just to language but to the visual space of the page, and even to the kind and shape of paper she chose to write on. They read a poem as a visual structure in which the

Sewall also relates the quantity of her writing to her New England and puritan heritage. He recalls that the puritan concern with the salvation of the soul led to an intensive practice of diary writing in order for subjects to keep a written account of God's dealings with them. Many puritans kept diaries so "at any moment and above all at the moment of death he [God] could review the long transaction.' (...) Emily Dickinson's need for strict account may not have been entirely theological, but the fierce introspection and the diary keeping of the Puritans surely had a bearing on her mental habits" (23). Of course, as before, it's insufficient to attribute the intensity of her writing to this mental habit, but it brings to light a significant aspect of Dickinson's upbringing and how it had a say on her *oeuvre*: she adopts practices and themes from her religious background without fully committing to religious faith.

In "Satin Cash: Dickinson's Reserves," Daniel Katz tackles the relationship between Dickinson's refusal to publish and religion. He argues that "Dickinson cannot be seen as appealing to religious authority in her decision not to publish because it is the Christian economy of publication which she is refusing" (57). He bases this argument on the poem "Publication – is the Auction / Of the Mind of a Man" in which, following Protestant iconoclasm, "Christ is figured as the publication of God's mind, as God's worldly text, and his body is put in parallel with the printed page" (57). In other words, God is secularized economically through the connection of the body of Christ with the published product. Dickinson writes: "its Corporeal illustration—Sell /The Royal Air— / In the Parcel—Be the Merchant /of the Heavenly Grace—But reduce no Human Spirit / To Disgrace of Price..." (57). The poem articulates the idea of published thoughts, "the auction of the mind of a man," with incarnation, and criticizes it from the perspective of economic circulation: the body of Christ is a parcel in the market.

This economy of publication would thus be one of the earliest constructs of the literary institution. It promotes the idea that the written work is a derivative product of a purer, higher and truer order, but also supports the idea that value can only be given to complete and finished products. On these grounds, we can see that Dickinson's

slants of her dashes, the placement and shape of words and letters across the space of her writing surface, and the material characteristics of each scrap of paper or embossed stationary page all signify as elements of the poetry. (...) My own work with the manuscripts and poetry, in contrast, convinces me that while Dickinson took a real interest in writing out her poems, this was for her always an activity of secondary importance to her play with language" ("Introduction" 6). Miller has been much closer to Dickinson's work and has dedicated more time to thinking about her than I have, but following Howe, Bervin and Werner, as well as my own experience of reading her poems and relating to their manuscripts online and at a recent exhibit, my position follows the scholars that Miller alludes to in this passage.

resistance to publish is also another form of resisting literary commerce. And, also, that her resistance to the whole, to the presentation of her *oeuvre* as a *corpus*, responds to this patriarchal and logocentric logic by rendering the concept and commerce of incarnation impossible.

The resistance of her work to this commerce, and to investing in it through the project of a published book, has yet another side to it. Not only does her writing practice resist entering the realm of economic circulation but it also invests in loss rather than gain:

The chemical conviction
That Nought be lost
Enable in Disaster
My fractured Trust –

The Faces of the
Atoms
If I shall see
How more the
Finished Creatures
Departed Me!

Entrusted [Me!] (M480-481)

This poem is significant for two main reasons: first, it is a metapoem that reflects on her *oeuvre*. Second, it can be read in an economic key. To start, a chemical principle is announced: that nothing be lost. This refers to the chemical conviction of the conservation of mass that was discovered in the 18th century, which Dickinson learned about at Mount Holyoke Female Seminary (Mary Lyon, its founder, was trained as a chemist). According to this principle, when matter is transformed nothing is created or destroyed; the total amount of mass remains constant. Dickinson's poem restates this principle by stressing one side of it: that nothing is lost when matter is transformed. In the next two lines, the speaker posits itself as a lawbreaker: it transgresses the principle mentioned above, which is why it enables disaster instead of something with a positive outcome.

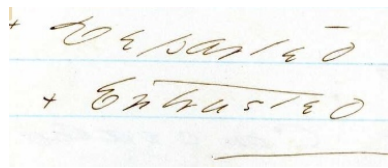
So, if the principle that says nothing can be lost has been transgressed, it's because something is lost. At this moment the chemical principle turns into an economic one: the subject of this stanza is a 'Trust'. "Trust" could also refer to the value of

confiding in someone else, but the references to destruction, fragmentation and loss make a stronger case for the idea that Dickinson is describing her own work, and that, whilst trust funds are made to prevent economic losses, this particular one has failed to protect and profit from its assets.

The second stanza affirms the poem's metapoetic dimension. We have to take into account Dickinson's insistence on the shattered quality of her work in order to understand why the Trust is fractured. Porter claims that "[u]nity is not, despite their compactness, a quality of Dickinson's poems. The truth is that they disperse rather than hold" (111). Her references to atoms usually refer to the poems' fractured quality. In a poem written a few years before this one, she writes: "I told my Soul to sing -// She said her strings were/ snapt - / Her Bow - to atoms blown -/" (F423 M168-169). In these lines the lyrical "I's" vocal cords are violently shattered, and the atoms refer more to these fractured residues than to an enclosed self-identity. Thus, in the poem in question, the metaphorical fractured Trust is the first reference to her *oeuvre*, but we can only assert this after reading the first lines of the second stanza.

The continuity between the lines, between the fractured trust and the faces of the atoms, connects them; the second stanza clarifies the first. The fragmentary nature of her work is described twice, stressing the force that form has in the transgression of the principle that says that nothing can be lost and the conception that a poem has to be whole. Hence, this poem is representative of her scrap-poetics, which resists turning into a profitable product and doesn't meet the standards of the literary institution. The poem describes a powerless *oeuvre*: the Trust, to atoms blown, enables disaster as it fails to protect and preserve its assets.

By the end of the poem, the "finished creatures" have departed—perhaps they've been mailed, or maybe they've just gone astray. Throughout this chapter I argue that Dickinson's poems sustain a principle of incompleteness. For this reason I need to question how the departure of these "finished" creatures affects their quality of being finished. When they depart, do they follow the chemical conviction that nought be lost or don't they? If they don't, does the poem have a ring structure; does the beginning answer the end and is disaster enabled in each of these creatures? Does the fact that, once departed, they're no longer under the author's control make them prone to incompleteness? In the last line of this poem there is a word variant:



+Departed / + Entrusted ²⁷

Franklin and Miller chose to use “Departed” in the poem’s published version, but “Entrusted” actually gives the poem a ring structure. If we read it at the end we repeat the sound of the word ‘Trust from the beginning and, in this way, lexically tie the entrusted creatures to the fractured trust above. But here the variation isn’t simply a possible substitution for “departed.” Both words are necessary in order to affirm what the poem suggests from the beginning: that we’re facing an economic twist in which loss (departed) and Trust (entrusted) have to be read in the same key —and it is also a precise example of why Dickinson’s variations are not only different versions of a poem, but ways of bifurcating meanings within them and keeping the poems open, unfinished. Interweaving both concepts in the unique and poetical way it does, this poem presents Dickinson’s *oeuvre* as an unworking investment in loss.

So let’s recapitulate and acknowledge two different elements that enable economic disaster in her work. First, the many formats in which it was written; this is to say, the fractured superficies of its inscription that resist becoming a book and turning into a whole. Second, the way her work was squandered by being kept from the institution of literature. Katz points out that her work “subverts the traditional conceptualizations of profit and loss, and that (...) loss is figured as the necessary reserve” (61). What this means is that Dickinson’s sense of squander is to fold the flood in the drawer. Since her father and brother “held long tenures as treasurers of Amherst College” (Sewall 10), Katz suggestively remarks that “by assuming the role of a sort of literary treasurer, Dickinson ironically writes herself into the male familial heritage...” (53). What’s ironic, as we see in this poem, is that Dickinson, the treasurer, is a squanderer and consequently defies the male familial heritage.

Her writing practice doesn’t only transgress and question patriarchal authority over literary history, but also strikes the very logic that makes authority itself possible by unleashing a movement of loss and powerlessness (the chaff) instead of one of profit and power (the wheat). Consequently, her work is inscribed into an economy of expenditure because “she destines her work to sheer loss, refusing to recuperate her

²⁷ Manuscript owned by the Houghton Library, Harvard University. Accessed at www.edickinson.org on 16 February 2016.

massive investment in writing” (Katz 52) and also because it is physically resistant to becoming a product of the institution of literature, which is why we “remain particularly unable to define Dickinson’s general literary enterprise” (Stonum 505). Porter considers “[t]he special experience of reading Dickinson [to be] that there is an unprecedented lack of leading, of organizing, of general direction” (in Stonum 508-9). He is quite right, but one of the terms he uses is a very wrong choice. Whilst he states that there is a lack of “general direction,” in the next section I’ll try to argue that if there is a thread running through her *oeuvre*, only to unwork it, it is an uninterrupted sense of *direction* which unleashes squander and loss.

2.2. LET’S GET LOST

If Dickinson resists the literary institution, her poetry is nonetheless influenced by another order: epistolary writing. Everything a letter implies, such as an envelope, a folded sheet of paper, a seal, and the action of mailing a letter to an absent addressee are central aspects of her poetics. In an article called “Dickinson’s Letters to Abiah Root: Formulating the Reader as Absentee,” Martin Orzeck accurately suggests “we should (...) treat the correspondence in general, but especially the early correspondence, as a kind of writer’s workshop...” (153). I think this an extremely accurate and valuable insight that introduces my own approach to the relationship between Dickinson’s letters and poems: epistolary correspondence as the model according to which she develops a structure of address in her poems.

The first chapter of Cristanne Miller’s *Emily Dickinson: A Poet’s Grammar* is a comprehensive reflection on the relationship between Dickinson’s two most intense writing practices: letter writing and poetry. The author reflects on Dickinson’s attraction to letter writing and the way in which she dislocated the boundaries between letters and poems. She recalls that Dickinson included and sent poems in letters, often transcribed lines from her poems in the letters, and wrote sentences in hymn meter and with rhyme, changing from prose to verse in midsentence (10). Miller focuses more on the way the letters incorporate the poetic rather than on how letter writing affected Dickinson’s poems—even though she does analyze some of the poems in which Dickinson speaks about letters or compares the role of the poet to a letter writer (see pp.7-8).²⁸

²⁸ Miller refers to “This is My Letter to the World;” “A Letter is a Joy of Earth;” “The Way I read a Letter’s – this –;” “Going – to – Her;” and “In Ebon Box, when years have flown.”

Accordingly, Miller affirms that

...the metaphor of poet as letter writer aptly characterizes Dickinson's art, first because of the stylistic similarities of her poems and letters, and second because several of her poems were literally "letter[s] to the world," either mailed alone without other comment or included in more conventional letters. (9)

In both cases the letter is given centrality: it incorporates stylistic elements from poetry and also becomes a theme in Dickinson's poems. From a more structural perspective, Miller also stresses that the physical distance that epistolary correspondence involves was reproduced in Dickinson's poems by a "metaphorical distance created by opaque and elliptical language" (12). Here Miller translates epistolary distance into the language of poetry: metaphoric, opaque, indirect language. But why is that translation necessary? Can't the epistolary drives be transposed to poetry just as poetry's stylistic elements are incorporated in the letters? In what follows I will answer affirmatively by showing how the structures of address in some of Dickinson's poems incorporate epistolary drives. For this reason, my arguments won't necessarily be developed in reference to poems *about* letters but rather in reference to poems that have a structure of address modeled after the letter.

To start, I will focus on some of Dickinson's reflections on epistolary correspondence. Specifically, on two passages from her letters in which she suggests that epistolary correspondence and, more specifically, the reception of and reply to a letter, validates, affirms or helps what was initially written to come into existence and become fully present. I find these passages significant because she only refers to this problem when there is or has been a lack of response; this is to say, when the texts in question are, according to her own criteria, not valid. One of these passages is found in a letter to her friend Jane Humphrey, from January 1850:

Dear Jane.

I have written you a great many letters since you left me— not the kind of letters that go in post-offices — and ride in mail-bags — but queer— little silent ones — very full of affection — and full of confidence — but wanting in proof to you, therefore not valid — somehow you will not answer them — and you *would* paper, and ink letters — I will try one of *those*... (L30 81)

The difference between both kinds of letters is that the first are valid because they can be answered: seen, received and responded to. The second kind, poems or prayers perhaps, are invalid because they are not open to reception and correspondence. This difference is important for us to start understanding the way Dickinson relates reception and completion, as well as the state of a text when reception is not guaranteed. Hence, the passage introduces the poet's own literary order in which completion and presence rely on reception and are always at risk of a letter never reaching its destiny.

This letter points to what, in *The Post Card*, Derrida calls the "tragedy of destination:" "I would like to address myself, in a straight line, directly, without *courier*, only to you, but I do not arrive, and that is the worst of it. A tragedy, my love, of destination" (23). He signals two forms of non-arrival: the first one has to do with the distance and mediation that sending involves. Likewise, the impossibility of addressing Jane Humphrey in a straight line, without a courier, is precisely the reason Dickinson tells her that she is writing a *paper* and *ink* letter instead. This type of letter will sacrifice part of the intimacy that the "queer little silent one" carried. Now, for Derrida, the second form of non-arrival is one we are more familiar with: it is the case of a lost letter, when the written, material address –the piece of paper— does not arrive. From these two perspectives, "validity," in the terms Dickinson describes above, is never really possible: wherever an address is inscribed and sent off reception is thwarted. By speaking of "validity" when she is actually stressing an "invalid" means of address or communication, Dickinson, sly as ever, remains at the margins of the paper and the law.

The next passage about a lack of correspondence also speaks about the law. It is addressed to Dickinson's brother Austin on the occasion of him owing her a letter.

I presume you remember a story Vinnie tells of a Breach of the promise case where the correspondence between the parties consisted of a reply from the girl to one she had never received, but was daily expecting – well I am writing an answer to the letter I haven't had, so you will see the force of the accompanying anecdote. (L108 230)

This letter is about a lack of correspondence. Besides telling a story about a girl in a similar position to her own, given the lack of response from Austin, the "force of the accompanying anecdote" is enormous because it tells a story about a girl who has been betrayed: she was asked to be married by a man who later broke his oath ("Breach of the promise case"). With this story Dickinson suggests that not responding is a way in which the laws of epistolary writing are violated but also, and more importantly, that the laws

of epistolary writing *can* always be violated. Non-arrival or straying is an epistolary drive; loss is always already part of what makes sending a letter possible.

More radically, Derrida writes that a letter bears “within itself a force and structure, a straying of the destination, such that it must also not arrive in any way” (*The Post Card* 123). But this, he writes, “is not negative, it’s good and is the condition (...) that something does not arrive...” (121). It guarantees the letter will never cease to be both singular and other because by not arriving the addressee won’t appropriate it, and, by sending it off, the addressor won’t be absolutely present in it. Writing and reading, in this sense, turn the addressor and addressee into “departed/entrusted creatures” connected only by the distance the letter travels. Non-arrival is not only the result of chance, but also a condition of address itself, which isn’t only an element that connects two points at the ends of a line, but a movement that affirms the difference between the two points; their distance.

In a letter to Susan Gilbert from 1852, the poet writes: “Yet Susie, there will be romance in the letter’s ride to you –think of the hills and the dales, and the rivers it will pass over, and the drivers and conductors who will hurry it on to you; and won’t that make a poem such as can never be written?” (L77 181-182) Why is it that a poem like this cannot be written? Is the issue that it would not arrive? Or is the difficulty rather to make poems performatively create the movement of distant landscapes, of risky winds that can carry letters astray, and drivers and conductors prone to lose them as they pick their mailbags? In other words: is an epistolary poem impossible? This is the challenge that Dickinson’s poetry undertakes.

There are two main lessons she took from the model of epistolary writing and ascribed to poetry. According to my previous considerations, the first one is the risk of epistolary silence or non-arrival. The second one is that the addressee is always yet to come and never present. In this direction, Decker accurately argues that this is one of the main characteristics of her epistolary narrative: “A principle of deferral drives her epistolary discourse: reunion, presence, closure become objects of perpetual postponement” (143). Consequently, she “illuminates the fundamental condition of the familiar letter: the mutual absence of correspondents” (144-145). This is the reason why in many of the poems in which readers are directly addressed, their presence is never confirmed but posed only as a question or a deferred possibility.

I am now going to read three poems closely to reflect on how she “played the postcard against literature” (9), as Derrida puts it in his own epistolary exercise. They were written between 1858 and 1861, a time span in which Howe records that Dickinson “became the poet we know, (...) free to excavate and interrogate definition” (*My Emily Dickinson* 17). Let’s read the first:

My River runs to Thee -
Blue Sea – Wilt welcome me?

My River waits reply.
Oh Sea – look graciously!

I’ll fetch thee Brooks
From spotted nooks

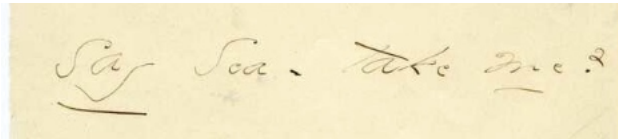
Say Sea – take me? (M107)

Franklin’s variorum edition records three different versions of this poem, written in 1861. The first one was written “on notepaper as if for a recipient, though without signature or address” (246). The second was bound in fascicle 9 and the third was sent in a letter to Mary Bowles. In this last version there are no spaces after each set of two lines, but the poem’s last two words: “take me” are indented and used to sign the letter, which is otherwise unsigned, as Franklin duly notes. I will analyze this poem to show how the variations can give us a closer understanding of Dickinson’s poetics of sending.

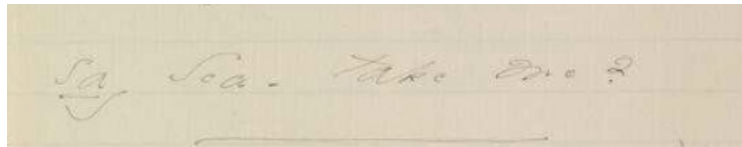
The poem is about sending, and what is being sent is a river, which turns into the only speaker of the poem in the last three lines. Initially, a lyrical “I” sends it off to the sea, directly addressed as a “you,” and, in the second line, the sea is asked to welcome the river, but it is asked by the river, who becomes a second speaker. These two verses recall the action of mailing, but instead of couriers we have the river’s own movement, which flows to the rhythm of the written text. An external party sends it, and once it is on the way, the “mailed” river speaks for itself and is left alone as the initial speaker is gradually dislodged from the poem (after the third line, the possessive is no longer used). Then, when the river asks the sea to look graciously, we enter the realm of risk and deferral. We become aware that reception is not a given and that the addressee might not have the chance or the will to look and read what has been sent. This is why it needs

convincing, which is what the river does next by promising the sea access to soundless streams.

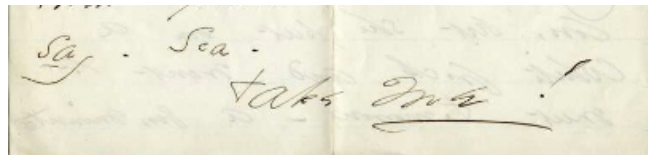
The last line gives the poem a metapoetic dimension that articulates its epistolary motifs and structure with Dickinson's poetics of reception. The lack of a comma between "Say" and "Sea" makes an imperative out of what could have only been a gentle, playful, request and which would have looked like this: "Say, Sea, take me?" This command is reinforced performatively by stressing the word "*Say*:" Sea (or you, the addressee) *say Sea* (read it), that way you will *Take Me*. The act of reading, of *saying* "sea," would thus be a way in which the river could be received. At this point the three versions of the poem gain significance:



F219A Written on notepaper: Say Sea - Take me?



F219B Included in Fascicle 9 and used in reading edition: Say Sea - take me?



F291C End of letter 235 to Mary Bowles: Say - Sea - / take Me!²⁹

In each version of this line the italicized words and punctuation change. Dickinson used italics frequently. As a reader and a writer, she *bears* how this stylistic stress affects the meaning and tone of what is said or written. In 1877 she wrote the following passage in a letter addressed to Higginson:

When a few years old – I was taken to a funeral which I now know was a peculiar distress, and the Clergymen asked “Is the Arm of the Lord shortened that it cannot save?”

²⁹ These manuscripts are owned by the Houghton Library, Harvard University, and were accessed at www.edickinson.org on April 14 2017.

He italicized the “cannot.” I mistook the accent for a doubt in Immortality and not daring to ask, it besets me still. (L503 583)

This passage is an example of how italics affect the meaning that a sentence constructs: the religious hesitation of a clergyman is expressed through the italicized sound. We cannot standardize Dickinson’s italics and affirm that they always stress a hesitation based on this example, but we should pay close attention when she uses them. In the three versions above, “say” remains italicized with a performative role whilst “me” changes.

In F219A “me” is in italics. This makes the following point: once the river is taken in by the sea it will no longer be a river; the “I” of the lyrical subject will become one with the ocean. If this is the case, the stress contributes to create and anticipate the identity split of the speaker. Nevertheless, it can also seek to show that the speaker(s) of the poem is a fiction. There is no doubt that Dickinson “clearly intuit[s] the split between what Barthes has called ‘the one *who speaks* (in the narrative)’ and ‘the one *who is*’” (Decker 143). In a well-known letter she writes: “When I state myself, as the Representative of the Verse – it does not mean – me – but a supposed person” (L268 412). In this sense, Dickinson steps away from the romantic model of lyric expressivity in which the speaker of the poem is the outlet of the poet’s voice. On the contrary, for Dickinson, poems cast “Me from Myself - to banish” (M345). Rather than a place for subjectivity to dwell in, poetry is a place for subjectivity to be displaced.³⁰ On this basis, the italics might stress that *me* is the fictitious river and not the poet. But it can also be a modern recourse of estrangement that contributes to exhibit the metapoetic force of the poem by suggesting that “me” is not the river but the poem as such. In this case, the poem is sent to the reader, who is strongly encouraged to “*Say* Sea” through the act of reading that line.

In F219B “me” loses the italics and the river’s fictitious voice is restored. In consequence, a reflection on lyric expressivity is not stressed, but a metapoetic reading of the poem is still possible, because the river stands as a metaphor of the poem itself, and of its movements and moments of address. These two versions end with a question mark, which leaves the sea’s reception of the river in the hands of expectation and the reader is asked to respond.

³⁰ I will develop this idea further in the next section.

In F219C “Take *Me!*” is used as a signature in a letter that ends with this poem. “Me” appears italicized again and the question mark is replaced by an exclamation point. The split between the one *who speaks* (in the narrative) and the one *who is* acquires a new meaning because “Take *Me!*” is in the place where the poet should have signed her name according to the conventions of epistolary writing. Therefore, the italics reverse the process that took place in the first two versions: instead of establishing that the representative of the verse is a fiction, it opens a personal relationship between the letter’s recipient and its author. Bowles is expected to *Say* Sea and feel closer to Dickinson. In the part of the letter that immediately precedes the poem, she tells Mrs. Bowles that no one in her family could send their love because they were busy, so “I brought my own – myself, to you and Mr. Bowles. Please remember me, because I remember you – Always” (L235 377). In this context, there is no split between the writer of the letter and the lyrical “I” of the poem. Basically, the difference between the two poems she kept to herself and this one is that the first do not express a feeling, like love, to an identified addressee, even if she is absent. They perform a movement of sending which is marked by the condition of separation intrinsic to epistolary writing.

We must also compare the role of the question marks in the first two versions to the exclamation mark that closes the final line of the poem included in the letter. Placing a question mark after the command to read leaves the reception of the river and the poem in the hands of expectation. Here Dickinson does what Derrida attributes to “master thinkers:”

Master thinkers are also masters of the post. Knowing well how to play with *the poste restante*. Knowing how not to be there and how to be strong for not being there right away. Knowing how not to deliver on command, how to wait and make wait (...) The post is always *en reste*, and always *restante*. It awaits the addressee who might always, *by chance*, not arrive. (*The Post Card* 191)

As a master of the post, her poem defers its readers and is strong, from the very start, “for not being there.” From the start, the speaker that sends the river is rapidly left out of the poem. The river, which remains, never stops remaining, not even when the poem is finished. And everyone ends up waiting: the reader doesn’t know what finally happened between the sea and the river (and if the river arrived with brooks from spotted nooks, the sea might have not even taken in the same river that had promised it those brooks, for it would have been flooded by otherness). And of course the river,

since the very start, desires and waits for *co-response*. At the same time, the last line questions and defers the arrival of the reader; even though a command is given, the question mark postpones its realization. All of these resources produce a sense of separation and distance between the poem that is sent and the reader who is called for and who is not guaranteed.

The poem included in the letter to Bowles ends with an exclamation point that helps avoid deferral and makes the poem more assertive and accomplished. This version literally carries a message (love) that will be received assertively when the addressee finishes reading the letter. This is also confirmed by the fact that the last line is in the place of the signature, which is the last thing there is to read in a letter, its physical conclusion. In this case, the poem's intention is different: rather than stressing the epistolary condition of separation it manifests a desire to overcome it.

In the next two poems we can see how Dickinson turned the risk of epistolary silence or the possibility of a letter not arriving at its destination into a driving force of her poetry. In these poems, as in the latter, something is sent and reception is deferred. But here the stress is put on loss and non-arrival rather than on sending.

Howe has argued that Dickinson's refusal to publish was "a consummate Calvinist gesture of self-assertion by a poet with a faith to fling election loose across the incandescent shadows of futurity" (*My Emily Dickinson* 49). This doesn't imply that Dickinson deferred publishing for divine compensation, but that she inherited and dramatized a Calvinist sense of deferral. Howe shows that, in regard to publishing, the Calvinist influence had more to do with a movement—a *faith to defer, to fling*—than with a belief in salvation or divine compensation. I want to add that there are also some poems in which biblical themes performatively open this structure of deferral. For example, Richard Wilbur has argued that for Dickinson "heaven" was a spatial metaphor: the distance or empty space between where I am and what I can't reach: "'Heaven,' she said, 'is what I cannot reach'" (119), "an infinitely remote blank" (121). In the next two poems that we will read the possibility and impossibility of salvation can also be read in a metapoetic light in which an infinitely remote blank separates the poem and the reader: the reader as an improbable savior.

The following poem, from 1858, is included in Dickinson's first bound fascicle.

Adrift! A little boat adrift!
And night is coming down!

Will *no* one guide a little boat
Unto the nearest town?

So sailors say – on yesterday –
Just as the dusk was brown
One little boat gave up its strife
And gurgled down and down.

So angels say - on yesterday –
Just as the dawn was red
One little boat – o'erspent with gales –
Retrimmed its masts – redecked its sails –
And shot – exultant on! (M39)

In her recent edition of Dickinson's poems, Miller records that "several aspects of this poem appear in the paintings *Manhood* and *Old Age* by Thomas Cole (1801-1848), part of his allegorical series *The Voyage of Life* (1842) (...). In 1859, ED signed herself 'Cole' in a letter (L214)" (743). His series depicts four phases of life (*Childhood*, *Youth*, *Manhood* and *Old Age*). In each picture "the ever-more-turbulent stream" deviates the boat from "its course and relentlessly carries him [the man in the boat] toward the next picture in the series, where nature's fury, evil demons, and self-doubt will threaten his very existence. Only prayer, Cole suggests, can save the voyager from a dark and tragic fate" (*National Gallery of Art Web*).³¹

In this respect, Judith Farr writes that, in Dickinson's poem, the

little boat, personification of the soul, might have its antecedents elsewhere than in Cole's series, but other aspects of the poem –the brown dusk, the raining down of night, the red dawn, the angels–appear in *Manhood* and *Old Age*. The counterpoint between the sailors who see only shipwreck and the angels who recognize that it leads to eternal life on another sea is implicit in Cole. (Farr in Derrick, Brígido and González 45)

I want to propose a different reading of this poem in which the little boat is not representative of the soul but of the poem, and in which Dickinson invokes a Calvinist sense of deferral, of salvation being always *there* and *not yet here* in order to open a relationship with the reader through distance instead of proximity, through strangeness

³¹ Accessed on November 11 2017: <https://www.nga.gov/Collection/art-object-page.52451.html>

instead of recognition, and through the impossible instead of the possible. The description of the boat being little and lost (as it appears in Cole's paintings) is similar to the poems that Dickinson wrote on loose scraps of paper. Thinking about the little boat as a metaphor of a poem in the context of Dickinson's *oeuvre* ties together the idea of direction, loss, destruction, journey and the chance of (non)arrival. It represents and synthesizes the driving forces of her poems, always *en route* or adrift and never at their point of departure or destination. Let's read the poem in this metapoetic light.

At the beginning, it announces that a boat —a poem— is adrift. In fact, it seems auto-referential because the first word physically, scripturally, puts the poem out there, in the same way that the former poem sent the river off in the first line. The second line stresses this as it situates the event of the poem in the present progressive tense; therefore, night is coming down slowly, continuously, while we are in front of the poem and read it downwards. Then there is a reference to the reader in the usual terms in which her poems do this: in the form of a plea that goes unanswered because, like the boat, her readers are always adrift too: "Will *no* one guide a little boat unto the nearest town?" is an indirect way of asking: "*Say* Sea, take me?" This is an affirmation of the distance that separates the boat adrift (the poem) and the *no* one that it calls for and who is not there yet. The following two stanzas contemplate what will happen if *no* one guides the little boat to the nearest town or if they do; the outcomes of the possibility or impossibility of reception.

Let's pay attention to the narrative break that takes place in between the first stanza and the next two. The slow and progressive rhythm in which the poem's first stanza announces that the little boat is lost is suddenly interrupted. If a lyrical voice was being created, the second stanza suddenly gives its place to a less intimate one that speaks in the past tense and about something others —and not the lyrical voice— say. This has an effect of estrangement on the reader who, for a moment, takes her eyes off the page. What seems to be in play is a lapse or leap in time, an ellipsis, which is precisely how each painting in Cole's series is related: time lapses in life phases. Since not all of the elements of the poem are depicted in Cole's paintings it might be better if we cinematographically visualize each of these stanzas as if they were different scenes, each one representing a different and possible outcome of one same situation.

In the first, it is sunset: we see a little boat aimlessly brushing against the waves. In the second stanza, the day is clear again, in order to show that there has been a time

lapse. Standing against an old wall in a port, two tattooed sailors smoke cigarettes and speak about a small sinister sail that was found floating near the harbor in the morning. The third stanza keeps the rhythm and tone of the second, which is confirmed and created by the anaphora that connects them and that separates them from the first. Here we see a similar interaction between the angels, but in something like a sky-like setting. They speak about the dangers a boat went through the night before, but which finally managed to continue its journey.³²

The first scene stands alone visually and narratively whilst the last two have a very similar narrative and visual structure but an extremely different outcome. Accordingly, the narrative break and ellipsis produce a virtual dimension in which the best and worst case scenarios of answering to the first stanza's plea are contemplated. If no one guides the little boat adrift, the outcome will be the destructive scenario discussed by the sailors. If someone guides it, the outcome will be the angels' narrative about its force to *shoot - exultant on*. This strategy cunningly puts the reader under pressure: you must guide it or it will sink. In a close study of Dickinson's first fascicle, Derrick, Brígido and González jointly argue that these two stanzas represent a relationship with death that Dickinson was ambiguous about: the second stanza would address death from a secular and terrestrial perspective, whilst the third would express the Christian salvation of the soul, eternity. A poem, then, about religious doubt. My reading, which aims to study Dickinson's strategies of poetic address, sees something else in these two possibilities, simply: what happens when a poem is read and when it isn't.

In this context I want to return to the connection, in her poetics, between deferral and the idea of eternity with the realization that there is an enormous gap or blank space *separating* her subjects from immortality. For Dickinson, that spacing is where the "I" takes shape. In one of the earliest poems in which she mentions eternity (1863), she writes about this separation and the "I" of this in-between: "Behind Me – dips Eternity – / Before Me – Immortality – / Myself – the Term between –" (M373). In a poem written eleven years later, she still held the same position: "Be Sue, while / I

³² Scholars who interpret the boat as the soul consider that this poem is about divine salvation. But this is the less interesting reading of the poem because it doesn't take into consideration Dickinson's singular way of interweaving writing and religious belief, which I am discovering to be complex and full of dislocating influences: I've mentioned that her Calvinist heritage gives shape to a sense of deferral (Howe), to an acknowledgment of a restricted economy in which the body of Christ is figured as a product and a merchant (Katz), and to an intense writing habit (Sewall).

am Emily – / Be next, what / you have ever / been, Infinity –” (F1658A M733). In both examples the self is separated from an infinite realm of non-self, which is where the self is heading. Taking into consideration Howe’s and Wilbur’s reflections on her Calvinist heritage and biblical references, in Dickinson’s poems the concept of eternity doesn’t refer solely to the realm of salvation but also to a sense of infinite direction in which the subject is always heading to its dissolution. There is a common movement between sending a letter and the distance traveled by a soul. In both cases the subject or the poem could get lost and never arrive.

Accordingly, this poem is very similar to the previous one, because its outcome is also unknown. In the first poem we saw the river begging the sea, or the reader, for reception through performativity. The display of the two possible outcomes of the little boat plays the same role. It’s an attempt to convince the reader of receiving it: *look graciously* (this is what the river asks the sea in the river poem), if not I could drown. And, again, as a poem written by a master of the post, it keeps everyone waiting: the reader and the boat. The screen goes black after the angels’ conversation, the audience leaves the cinema unfulfilled, *the movie started at the climax! There is no resolution!* Some ask for their money to be returned, but they are confronted with a disturbing argument: this cinema doesn’t work on the basis of a symmetrical economy of exchange and give and take, here you only invest in a fractured Trust. *An economy a drift!*

This next poem, from 1860, is like a zoomed lens into the second stanza of the previous poem, in which the sailors speak about a boat that sunk:

‘Twas such a little - little boat

That toddled down the bay!

‘Twas such a gallant - gallant sea

That beckoned it away!

‘Twas such a greedy, greedy wave

That licked it from the Coast -

Nor ever guessed the stately sails

My little craft was *lost!*

(M91)

Again, the sea is the setting; no “you” is being directly addressed, and the speaker seems to be narrating a “tragedy of destination.” Dickinson’s reference to the *little - little* size of the boat recalls the little size of her poems. The gallant sea is accused of making the boat

lose its direction, and we are told it was one greedy wave that licked it away. In this case the Sea doesn't look graciously, as the river asked it in the first poem. It rather licks it away ungraciously. This is a significant image for two reasons: because the boat is rejected and also because of the reference to an action of the tongue (a wave brushing a boat astray can indeed look like a lick of the tongue), which connects the straying of the boat or poem to what enabled its departure (and its disaster): language. The last line confirms the boat is lost, and, just before, it is said that "[n]or ever guessed the stately sails." This line suggests that someone—no one in particular— could have found it, but the deferral of the recipient and the structural condition of separation it implies make the quest of finding the little boat nearly impossible, the reader is as astray as the boat itself. In fact, the possibility of losses is stronger in Dickinson's poems than the affirmation of reception—probably because of the unbridgeable and ongoing distance between the poem and the reader. It is in this sense that the distance she sets up through the structure of address makes not only the poem, but also the readers feel lost, as if something could not be read, captured or "saved."

The experience of incompleteness offered by strategies of separation, loss and deferral that take place in each poem unwork the possibility of a reading based on recognition and understanding. In an interview about Dickinson, the contemporary writer Marilynne Robinson says that "[i]n the oddest way, unless I utterly memorize them [Dickinson's poems], they always seem new to me. There are very few of them that I feel I have 'appropriated' at all" (in Gardner 54). This experience of powerlessness is common to many readers of her work, and is caused by the way in which the poems defer reception, making room for the illegible. When Higginson visited Dickinson in Amherst, she described her own experience of reading poetry as follows: "If I read a book [and] it makes my whole body so cold no fire ever can warm me I know *that* is poetry. If I feel physically as if the top of my head were taken off, I know *that* is poetry" (L342a 473). Instead of emotional warmth or a sense of recognition or familiarity, the effects of poetry are described as a sort of physical and reflective numbness or derangement. In this way, she steps away from the traditional cathartic or hermeneutic receptions of literature, and describes an ecstatic effect in which the reader is put *beside* herself. For the poet, reading is one of those moments she describes in a poem: "The soul has moments of escape - / When bursting all the doors / She dances like a Bomb, abroad ..." (F360 M190).

This ecstatic state also appears in Dickinson's poems and narratives when she describes the type of communication experienced in the face of a dying other. In these texts watching someone die gives way to a nearly contagious loss of the self and to a lack of understanding and recognition. I want to argue that there is a correlation in her poetics between the epistolary drives (sending, deferral, absenting of subjects involved) and the interruption of self-presence and correspondence of loss that dying opens up. Moreover, the way in which address and dying are interrelated in her work is similar to Blanchot's view in *The Unavowable Community*. This is especially so because, for Dickinson, the type of "communication" that opens up in death dramatizes the risk of non-correspondence that epistolary writing bears at its core. In this sense, address is also connected to an unreserved negativity that makes it impossible to respond to the other. Furthermore, Dickinson's sense of address also comes very close to an impersonal state that does not exclude the relational. I'll now introduce and analyze some of her reflections on dying and finitude to support this connection.

A letter Dickinson wrote to her friend Abiah Root when she was sixteen years old introduces how she began to grasp death both as her ownmost possibility and impossibility: as a something that was hers and at the same time not hers. In this passage she relates how she could not come to terms with the idea of a dying "I:"

I don't know why it is but it does not seem to me that I shall ever cease to live on earth
—I cannot imagine with the farthest stretch of my imagination my own death scene— It
does not seem to me that I shall ever close my eyes in death. I cannot realize that the
grave will be my last home — that friends will weep over my coffin and that my name will
be mentioned, as one who has ceased to be among the haunts of the living... (L10 23)

There is a gap separating the idea of her own death (possibility) and that of its realization (impossibility), which is manifested in the impossibility of *representing* her own death. But despite the claim that she cannot imagine her own death scene, this is what she goes on to do. An uncanny atmosphere builds up as she imagines her death scene and views it *as if* she were not the deceased: she sees her friends weeping over her coffin, yet doesn't imagine the narrow darkness of one who opens her eyes within it. The idea of her own death creates an imaginary displacement of the subject that makes it step outside itself.

The impossibility of imagining her own death makes Dickinson susceptible to the death of others. Her poems and letters bear witness to the fact that she was very

impressed by the death of others; not only because it represents the end of their existence but because she perceives something inaccessible or unavowable in their loss: a call and a blow to the head. In a letter to Abiah Root from the same year, she narrates a call of friendship in the face of death:

My friend was Sophia Holland. She was too lovely for earth and she was transplanted from earth to heaven. I visited her often in sickness and watched over her bed. But at length Reason fled and the physician forbid any but the nurse to go into her room. Then it seemed to me I should die too if I could not be permitted to watch over her or even to look at her face. At length the doctor said she must die and allowed me to look at her a moment through the open door. (...)

There she lay (...) I looked as long as friends would permit and when they told me I must no longer look I let them lead me away (...). I felt I could not call her back again. I gave way to a fixed melancholy.

I told no one the cause of my grief, though it was gnawing at my very heartstrings. (L11 32)

The poet describes a sense, a pain, of powerlessness because she could neither help her friend nor communicate with her. It recalls the outrageous and painful calling that Blanchot describes in “The Community of Lovers”—the asymmetry of an impossible demand. In this death scene she realizes that Sophia cannot be called back to life and that one life cannot be exchanged for the other. The irreconcilable movement of their separation makes her aware of the fact that “[d]ying is something that every Dasein itself must take upon itself at the time. By its very essence, death is in every case mine...” (Heidegger §240 284). Dickinson realizes that she cannot change places with Sophia because they each have their own death. This makes her grief double: it is caused by the loss of her friend and by her own existential realization. Many of her texts indicate that singularity arises through coming into contact with the limits set up by the loss of another person. From this point of view, her notion of singularity is relational and not based on self-sameness. In a short letter to Susan Gilbert Dickinson dated about 1881, Dickinson wrote: “To be singular under plural circumstances is a becoming heroism” (L625 651). The heroic aspect of this has to do with the double grief described in the abovementioned letter. It takes courage (I have in mind this Greek *Arête* virtues that Homer ascribed to heroes) to put oneself in a situation that will “gnaw at the very

heartstrings” with the sharp edge of the unavowable, which arises from the loss of the other and the assertion that one will also die. However, this also helps her realize that dying is an opening to incompleteness and relationality. Death is not a limit that comes in the way of their relationship; rather, the particularity of this relationship is that it is based on the limit, on distance, and not on proximity or recognition.

The letter about Sophia Holland’s deathbed resonates in a poem she wrote seventeen years later (1863):

Like Eyes that looked on Wastes -
Incredulous of Ought
But Blank - and steady Wilderness -
Diversified by Night -

Just Infinities of Nought -
As far as it could see -
So looked the face I looked upon -
So looked itself - on Me -

I offered it no Help -
Because the Cause was Mine -
The Misery a Compact
As hopeless - as divine -

Neither - would be absolved -
Neither would be a Queen
Without the Other - Therefore -
We perish - tho’ We reign - (M335-336)

In the first line of the poem we are told that something is being observed through the simile of looking on wastes. Whatever is being looked upon belongs to the economy of loss that Dickinson’s *oeuvre*, as we saw in section one, consigns its poems to. The next line describes how the person who is watching feels about the situation: absolutely surprised, as if watching the unimaginable. The next three lines (the last one drops into the second stanza as if performatively executing this wasteful movement) describe the expenditure in sight. The four nouns used here reproduce an imagery of death: Blank, Wilderness, Night, and Nought. The wilderness is described as steady, and because the

wilderness is never steady, this means it is still wild. Night is diversified and so is Nought, in infinities. What the poem puts before us is thus the strongest and most exemplary squander of all: a dying person that is being taken away, wasted by the unknown. In the second line of the second stanza, the speaker asserts that this movement of loss is the only thing she can see, even though in the next three lines she straightforwardly says that they are both looking at each other's face. This indicates that the former lines were about a person.

This exchange is key to understanding Dickinson's poetics of reception, and the type of reading that her structures of address demand. A relationship is built through these glances, which is addressed again in the poem's last stanza. But let's stop in the second one for the time being. What draws my attention to the lines "So looked the face I looked upon - / So looked itself - on Me -" is that they indicate that both "subjects" (if they can still be called that at such a moment) are being mutually "diversified" by Nought, and, as a consequence, what is being described is what they both see happening to one another. This is what causes the double-sided grief in the narrative of Sophia Holland's death. Dickinson was faced with her friend's steady wilderness at the same time as she was confronted by her own condition of mortality. This is why, in this poem's third stanza, the speaker says it offered the other no help. The cause of this, she says, is Mine; the cause is her own death or squander.³³

In my reading of the previous three poems in this section, I stressed that their call for help or guidance is put in terms of an unanswered plea for reception. The same kind of structure is built into this poem: at first there's a reference to something that is at risk and lost—the dying person is in the same situation as the little boats adrift. Then there is a reference to reception, but in this case it's not aimed at the reader but at the subjects of the poem. Thus, unlike many of her poems, the case here isn't one of triangular address in which the speaker of the poem addresses the Sea, for instance, but means the reader. Probably because of this, reception isn't posed as a question or a

³³ In *Open Secrets: The Literature of Uncounted Experience*, Anne-Lise François pays special attention to this poem in order to support one of her book's main goals: to respond to and step away from "the language of limitless duty, impossible exigency, and heroic responsibility (...) that continues to inform Heideggerian work of disclosing Being and, more explicitly, post-Heideggerian ethical thought" (7). François argues that relating to others through non-appropriation and non-recognition shouldn't be an ethical burden, but rather a very easy-going form of passivity that Dickinson's simple formulation: "I offered it no help" would attest to. Basically, she wants to stress "the ethical value of doing nothing" (197). Nonetheless, this isn't the feeling we get in the narrative of Sophia Holland's death, in which the impossible exigency of giving her life in exchange for Sophia's is one of the causes of her torment. Moreover, the end of this poem doesn't corroborate François's claim: the speaker offers no help only because she has also been introduced in the movement of loss. It's not that she won't but that she can't.

deferred possibility. Instead there is a negative response: this letter will definitively not arrive, this is a tragedy of destination in which the two subjects involved are being wasted away. Moreover, the last stanza affirms the fact that they cannot save each other and that they will perish. Nevertheless, on the broken grounds of expenditure, non-apprehension and distance, their relationship is what absolves and squanders them sovereignly: “Neither - would be absolved -/ Neither would be a Queen / Without the Other.”

Dickinson’s poems rarely give so many answers as this one, and as clear as the sentence “I offered it no help.” I want to show that what happens in the relationship that this poem describes is what happens to the identity of the reader of many of Dickinson’s poems. Of course, reading them isn’t a deadly exercise, but there is a contagious movement of loss that affects the reader. The effect of poetry Dickinson creates doesn’t involve a self-present subject that can or must receive what the text offers. Quite the contrary, the reader’s identity is put into question, postponed and sent adrift as well. The exigency of reception is not only thwarted by the epistolary driving forces of the poem itself, but also by a mutual squander of the self, put into movement by the exposure of finitude that displaces the subjects involved in the poetic event and allows them to live an experience of the outside similar to the “inner experience” described by Bataille and taken up by Nancy and Blanchot.³⁴

A highly suggestive relationship between mortality, unworking communication and identity builds up in the next poem. The first two stanzas describe the “saddest, sweetest, maddest” noise that grows in spring, which is attributed to birds, the next three continue as follows:

It makes us think of all the dead
That sauntered with us here,
By separation's sorcery
Made cruelly more dear.

It makes us think of what we had,

³⁴ Deppman recalls that for Nancy “the revealing of the state of being-outside oneself (in one’s own birth, one’s own death, and the death of the other), is an active offering which initiates the forms of communicative and contagious being which ‘are’ community itself” (“Jean-Luc Nancy, Myth, and Literature” 22). For Blanchot, “a man alive, who sees a fellow-man die, can survive only outside himself” (cited in Madou 63).

And what we now deplore.
We almost wish those siren throats
Would go and sing no more.

An ear can break a human heart
As quickly as a spear.
We wish the ear had not a heart
So dangerously near.

(M690-691)

This poem embodies the ideas developed so far. The song of the birds makes the speaker recall her dead friends and companions. Separation is the only thing they still have in common, which is why it is both cruel and dear: it is a relation, yet through loss instead of presence and encounter. This is expressed in the first stanza. In the first two lines of the next one, the speaker continues to grieve, but in the following two it refers back to the noise of the birds that has led her to this melancholic state. In this case, the birds are attributed the throats of sirens since their song has put into movement the disappearing forces of death and introduced the poem into an economy of loss. In the next and last stanza, there is a twist we might not find so surprising by now. The poem ceases to focus on the “noise” of loss and suddenly focuses on reception. Nonetheless, something new is said here which hasn’t appeared in the aforementioned poems: the vulnerability of the body that listens, a vulnerability that stands very close to the one that gnawed at Dickinson’s heartstrings at the moment of Sophia Holland’s death. The ear functions as a piercing doorway to the heart. Violence is involved in the experience of reception, which recalls the way in which Dickinson described the effects of poetry to Higginson, specifically when she says that it makes her feel that the top of her head is going to explode. The sirens’ song unleashes a movement of loss that takes the reader with it through the sense of hearing.

Megan Craig states that for the poet, “[t]o be human is to be capable of feeling displaced, to be opened or knocked out of phase. For Dickinson this means that the ‘self’ is a precarious achievement, prone to disappearance” (209). Craig is absolutely right about Dickinson’s lyric subjects, but her article does not acknowledge the role of address in this displacement and only concentrates on the openness of the lyrical “I,” as if the poems, unlike their subjects, had a closed and absolute structure. In this way, the self’s disappearance becomes a *thematic* concern detached from the poem’s epistolary structure.

I want to argue that to be “knocked out of phase” is the effect Dickinson’s poems aim at producing, and yet another reason why they don’t reach their destination. Each poem attacks, *through the ear*, the self-present identity that would otherwise access and appropriate it.

Her poems unleash this contagious movement of loss by withdrawing meaning from the poems and creating an experience of incommunicability similar to the one experienced in the face of a dying other. To produce the desired effect, which is precisely an effect that is never produced, never created, that never arrives, Dickinson’s poetry develops certain strategies. One of them, as Craig points to, is the speaker’s inclination to disappearance. A metapoem from 1866 reflects on this:

I fit for them –
I seek the Dark
Till I am thorough fit.
The labor is a sober one
With the austerer sweet –

That abstinence of mine produce [of] me
A purer food for them, if I succeed,
If not I had
The transport of the aim – (M537)

In the first stanza, the speaker describes a task that is undertaken for an anonymous “them.” The relationship between the first two lines reveals that it is a spatial task: to “fit” for them, to make space, or maybe even to become that space, for we are told that what it attempts to do is darken. The speaker describes this task as a kind of labor that is austere and sober: it is concerned with omission and privation. Nevertheless, austerity is introduced as a form of generosity; it is a “sweet” gesture, carried out especially “for them.” In a letter to Susan from 1881, Dickinson complains specifically about the appreciation of her *blank* gestures: “To thank one for sweetness, is possible, but for spaciousness, out of sight –” (L707 699).

In the second stanza, the speaker hints at why spaciousness should be thanked: only if the speaker succeeds in becoming absent will the poem produce a desired effect on “them,” but there isn’t enough information in the poem to know what the effect is. The last words of the sixth line evoke the possibility of a risk, of failing: “if I succeed,”

says the speaker, and then focuses on what happens if it doesn't: "If not I had / the Transport of the Aim." Both words, "transport" and "aim," are, as all words in her poems, carefully chosen. They refer to the epistolary movement and direction of the poem as well as, in the case of transport, to ecstasy, synonyms she uses interchangeably in her poems. From this point of view, the poem runs two risks: the speaker might not be successful at disappearing, or the poem might not be received. In both cases two transports are at stake and interrelated: the ecstatic transport of the lyric subject dissolving in the outside, becoming empty space, and the transport of the poem heading toward a reader as it hinders the possibility of reception precisely through its blank spaces, which affirm distance.

In "Nobody's Business: Dickinson's Dissolving Audience," Robert Weisbuch reflects on the relationship between Dickinson's speakers and the reader. He sets out to show that Dickinson's written address aims at binding "the reader (...) free from her or his selfish identity— to the poem" (59). In the same line as Craig, he acknowledges that Dickinson's self is prone to disappearance, but he states that this happens because the lyrical "I" itself is meant to be a reader, "the poet-as-reader." He then goes on to state that this demands of the reader "a participatory effort beyond the norm of poetry of Dickinson's time" and creates "a rigorous democracy of meaning making" (67). At the same time that the lyrical voice "undoes" itself word by word or dash by dash, the reader is invited to leave his "ego identity" behind and "put together meaning in such a way that it is constantly undergoing revision" (65).

These ideas bind his study to one that privileges understanding, appropriation and access (an operative reading) over an inoperative form of communication: "All of Dickinson's poems offer the reader a fill-in-the-blank test (...). [H]er reader (...) experiences an intimacy without egotism. The poems are, in a sense, an autobiography not of Dickinson but of the reader, and yet, this reader is remade beyond the limits of personal experience, the bounds of ego" (69). This means that the reader is invited to fill in the other's blanks with his or her content. What is inaccessible in the poem is, from this point of view, a dwelling place for the reader that participates in making it meaningful.

But Dickinson is very explicit about the singularity of her blank spaces and the need for distance and deferral. In one of her early letters to Emily Fowler she leaves a blank space between the name of the addressee and the beginning of the letter. At the

end, she writes: “That isn’t an *empty* blank where I began – it is so full of affection that you can’t see any – that’s all” (L32 90). In a letter to Otis P. Lord she makes the following statement: “As there are Apartments in our own Minds that – (which) we never enter without Apology – we should respect the seals of others” (Lpf.21 914). Thus, to describe empty spaces in Dickinson’s poems as a “fill-in-the-blank test” goes against the principle of separation that articulates her writing practice.

After this passage, Weisbuch interprets a poem and exemplifies his role as its reader. He narrates how certain elements of the poem remind him of personal experiences that allow it to be understood. This is precisely what he calls “intimacy without egotism” since he “deposits” his experiences in the blank spaces of the other. Then, he adds: “Dickinson invites the personal memory but then employs it to surround it and, finally, obliterate it as something in-itself, so that we (and by now it is a ‘we’) arrive at an appreciation for the entire pattern” (70). But the activity that the reader must take on *beyond the limits of personal experience* doesn’t seem to be as beyond as he suggests because it only ends up giving way to an intersubjective and mutually recognizing “we.” The self is carried beyond itself, but not as a trace, not as an emotional and reflective numbness that bears witness to what cannot be “filled in,” what is inaccessible and irrevocably singular. Weisbuch shows no respect for the seals of others.

Virginia Jackson compellingly responds to this kind of position. She critically approaches a tradition of criticism (in which Weisbuch would fit despite his efforts not to) that has tried to portray Dickinson’s poems as if they were written by an exemplary private and lyrical poet with the aim of expressing her solitude and produce an emotional response in the reader based on recognition. “This structure,” she says, “is one in which saying ‘I’ can stand for saying ‘you,’ in which the poet’s solitude stands in for the solitude of the individual reader – a self-address so absolute that every self can identify it as his own” (79). This is exactly what Weisbuch calls an “intimacy without egotism,” the possibility of recognition and substitution between one and the other.

At the beginning of his article, however, Weisbuch does seem to ascribe the word “we” to something he doesn’t really know how to identify, probably because it demands an alternative to the notion of intersubjectivity that encloses his reflection: “Her ‘we’ is less obedient to any humanist tradition than it is part of an exposing of the myth of ego identity” (62). On this basis, “we” would not stand for a community that produces its own essence on account of multiple “I’s,” but only as a form of addressing

the myth of ego identity. As a whole, Weisbuch's paper is made up of different reactions to how Dickinson's poems affect their readers and to the kind of reading they demand. The only continuous affirmation that is carried out is that Dickinson's poems propose that "an authentic act of reading must be dangerous to identity" (71). At least this is absolutely true. But how are they dangerous, what strategies of written address does she use in order to introduce us in a movement of loss? These are questions I'm trying to answer.

In a puzzling envelope writing from about 1872, Dickinson wrote a poem in which the structure of address clearly echoes her observations on epistolary correspondence and is cut open (open to incompleteness) by the incommunicability of finitude. The way spaciousness relates the addressee and the speaker is clearer than in the previous poem, even though it has a similar structure. The version of the poem below is the direct manuscript transcription included in *The Gorgeous Nothings*:

Through what
transports of
Patience
I reached the
stolid Bliss
To breathe my
Blank without
thee
Attest me this
and this –
By that bleak
Exultation
I won as
near as this
Thy privilege
of dying
Abbreviate me
this
Remit me this
and this

(134)

The first five lines recall the sober labour (in this case “patient” and “stolid”) carried out in the previous poem. The transports of patience allude to the task of the speaker’s self-displacement, its disappearing goal. The next three lines pinpoint the poem at a place and time in which it hasn’t been delivered and is true to the risks of epistolary correspondence, for the excised speaker says it still “breathes its blank without thee.” Then, in lines nine and ten, the addressee is asked to vouch for this labor: “attest me this and this.” At the beginning of this section I referred to two epistolary passages in which Dickinson says that only reception can make a letter valid, an idea that seems to surface at this moment of the poem. There is a plea for attestation. But in those passages and in this poem validity isn’t guaranteed—in fact it’s improbable because attestation relies on the reception of something present by a self-present subject.³⁵ The next four lines recall the notion of success that was addressed in a conditional tense in the former poem, but here it’s stated more assertively: “I won as near as this...”. Therefore, in this case, the speaker announces having won something from its transport. The poem produced the desired effect: it asserted the reader’s “privilege of dying.” In fact, this line allows us to become aware of what was missing in the former poem and why the speaker’s transport was generous. The speaker’s movement of loss exposes finitude and, in consequence, introduces readers in that very movement.

But even though the poem succeeds in awakening in the other “her privilege of dying,” the poem retains its incompleteness by a subtle inversion and narrative twist: “Thy privilege / of dying / Abbreviate me.” The speaker suddenly jumps back into the present tense and announces that it too is affected, “abbreviated” or deprived, by the other’s movement of loss. One person’s privilege of dying makes another person lose something too. Moreover, “Abbreviate me” is linked to the next line and is meant to be read twice. In the second reading it becomes an imperative that alliterates with “Remit me this” (“Abbreviate me / this / Remit me this”). The speaker is instructing the reader on how to “abbreviate” it and set it free (“remit” it) from its identity by doing the same thing that the speaker of the poem is doing: sending something, *remitting*, heading toward, exposing finitudes with the structure of epistolary correspondence. The mutual

³⁵ In his outstanding essay on Paul Celan, “Poetics and Politics of Witnessing,” Derrida reflects and compares the structures of poetry and witnessing, based on Celan’s well known lines: “Niemand / zeugt für den Zeugen” (No one / bears witness for the witness). Here he writes: “In bearing witness, self-presence, the classic condition of responsibility, must be coextensive with the presence of other things, with having-been present to other things and to the presence of the other, for instance, to the addressee of the testimony. It is on this condition that the witness can respond, can answer for himself, be *responsible* for his testimony, as well as for the oath by which he commits himself to it and guarantees it” (79-80).

loss of self-presence is being set up. A correspondence of non-correspondence. But even this loss is incomplete and unfinished, it is not guaranteed. No “I” is entirely lost, just unworked in a movement that goes on continually. Subjects adrift. Neither drowned nor saved.

By referring to the privation of the subject with the word “abbreviate” Dickinson introduces the role of language and grammar in this labor. As we know, abbreviation is the process in which a word is shortened by the omission of letters. Since the moment I began speaking about facing the dying other the idea of an interrupted or incomplete communication started to arise, specifically in regard to the impossibility of knowing what the dying other goes through as she dies. In a letter to Susan from 1865, she wrote: “Could the dying confide Death, there would be no dead” (L321 445). If the dying could entrust their death to the charge or knowledge of someone else there would be no dead because that would imply that we are not mortal, for mortality is precisely the powerlessness to express, understand and appropriate the meaning and the experience of finitude. It is in this sense that, in another poem, she writes: “She – was mute from transport – / I – from agony” (F18 M38). In this poem the speaker watches a living being depart. Communication is thwarted both ways: the witness can’t speak either; grief for the other and the assertion of her own death come in the way. Therefore, when Dickinson writes “Thy privilege of dying / Abbreviate me,” two issues come forth: a relationship based on the two subjects’ omission, and the linguistic omission that plays a role in unworking a relationship that would otherwise be based on self-presence and recognition.

Abbreviation is an accurate word to understand the predominant techniques of her poems, like the omission of certain words that would be needed to form a complete sentence, or of punctuation marks that would correspond to a normative use of grammar. Let’s briefly take a look at a poem that shows how this works. I don’t want to spend much time on this subject because Dickinson scholars have broadly discussed her techniques of omission, concealment and reticence,³⁶ but I do want to relate these techniques specifically to her *oeuvre’s* strategies of address.

In a late envelope writing written after Helen Hunt Jackson’s death in 1885, we read a poem in which grammar, space and syntax are used as they are frequently in her work:

³⁶ See: Miller, Cristanne. *A Poet’s Grammar*. Harvard UP, 1987; Porter, David. “The Puzzling Idiom,” *Modern Idiom*. Harvard UP, 1981.

Helen of Troy
 will die, but
 Helen of Colorado
 never.
 Dear friend, can
 you walk
 were the last
 words that
 I wrote her —
 Dear friend I
 can fly – her
 immortal
 soaring reply –

(*The Gorgeous Nothings* 189)

Throughout the first four lines of the poem, the use of punctuation marks conforms to the rules of grammar. The first comma is appropriately placed before the conjunction that articulates two independent clauses. A period appears at the end of this compound sentence. What follows, however, is much less normative. The rhythm of the poem becomes faster as the punctuation marks that were guiding the reader (a common code) suddenly vanish. “Dear friend” is a fictitious quote of a letter written to Helen and, at the same time, a dialogic interpellation that addresses the reader, who is subsequently dislodged from the structural position of address by the line “were the last words that I wrote her.” Here two punctuation marks are omitted: the quotation marks to clarify that the speaker is referring to what was written in a letter or posed as dialogue, and the question mark after the word walk. Had she done this “correctly,” it would have been syntactically difficult for the attributive tag, “were the last words that I wrote her,” to stay in that place, for it would need to be separated by a comma from the question. And this part would have looked like this: *The last words that I wrote her were “Dear friend, can you walk?”* This formulation would break the proximity between the name “Helen of Colorado” and the words “Dear Friend,” and obstruct the anaphora that affirms correspondence, specifically, with the “Dear friend” that appears later. There is also a period missing after “the last words that I wrote her–;” a hyphen substitutes it and creates a pause as well.

Readers, like myself, who grew up with access only to Dickinson's reading editions have usually interpreted these hyphens as a resting place, a place to keep quiet, a gap of language and thought. However, when we face the manuscripts and see all the real gaps and blank spaces left in between the words, the hyphen's significance changes: it becomes directly articulated to grammar. As Howe has insisted in *The Birthmark* and *My Emily Dickinson*, this is one of the ways in which Dickinson declined normativity, inventing her own pauses—their lengths, and the tones and rhythms they produce. In the editors' decisions to reproduce the hyphens and "abbreviate" the blank spaces between the words, one still feels that these blank spaces get channeled through the hyphens, through the spaces between them and the words, and in the silences and joints that articulate the word combinations, but this is only the tip of the iceberg. This tip, the possibility of receiving it, says something about how the poems are configured around the blank spaces, how they cannot come into being without them. In a sense, their presence in the reading editions comes forth like a haunting or like a faded memory.

The possibility of seeing the blank spaces in her manuscripts is extremely suggestive. In the case of this poem they evoke the air through which the dialogue between these two friends glides, and also the distance between them. Correspondence requires spacing in order to be what it is: a relation through separation. In fact, from this point of view, it's very significant that the dialogue that takes place in the poem is not exactly a dialogue; it is the account of an epistolary transit that is traversed by loss in all too many ways.

Helen's response to the speaker of the poem is recorded in a similar way to the first interpellation: it lacks quotation marks, a period at the end and, this is different, the verb "was" is missing from the attributive tag. The last hyphen makes the immoral soaring reply grow stronger and more infinite because, unlike a period, it's not linked to termination or closure and rather stands for the continuity of a response that "shoots exultant on." Most of Dickinson's poems are written with a similar use of grammar and syntax. I've taken this example, and indeed I could have used many others, in order to show readers who are not very familiar with her work how her singular style is determined by omission (abbreviation). The poem is especially attractive for me because of its relationship with death and epistolary correspondence; it is addressed to a dead person (and to a reader until a specific moment) and uses an apostrophe to speak about an epistolary exchange.

By developing strategies of address based on the epistolary drives and on the interruption of self-presence and correspondence of loss that dying opens up, Dickinson developed a singular and unworking structure of poetic address in which incompleteness plays a major role. Each poem finds a way to make space for the unavowable, even if some readers, disturbed by the spaciousness, try to fill in the gaps, like Weisbuch. The lack of correspondence that opens up when somebody dies helps Dickinson dramatize and take to the limit the risk of non-correspondence that epistolary writing bears at its core. Hence, she develops a radical poetics of incompleteness that asks us to accept another way of reading and relating to one another. To conclude I want to offer a close reading of one last poem that reveals the strategies and reasons behind Dickinson's dramatization of the illegible and the desire to write to others in this difficult mode of *abbreviations* and *remissions*.

2.3. "GOING TO HER! HAPPY LETTER:" A POETICS OF INCOMPLETENESS

The relationship between omission and sending that takes place in the poem "Going to Her! Happy Letter" (1862)³⁷ offers an exemplary demonstration of the techniques of loss at play in Dickinson's strategies and tragedies of destination. In the poem, the speaker wants to make sure that the reader knows that something is missing and hasn't been included in the poem. It is a poem made up of boundaries; consequently, rather than being grounded on a principle of identity or self-sameness it is determined negatively and in relation to what it does not enclose. It shows us how Dickinson makes space for the illegible, which resists appropriation and recognition. Porter is right in saying that Dickinson didn't write an *ars poetica*, but if it made any sense to classify her poems canonically, I would make the case for this poem on account of how it relates writing and loss. It interweaves and dramatizes the incommunicability and singularity exposed by a dying other with the risks of non-arrival of epistolary correspondence, as the subjects involved in the poetic event withdraw.

Going - to - Her! Happy letter!
 Happy letter! Tell Her -
 Tell Her - the page I never wrote!

³⁷ Miller comments that "ED wrote this poem with two variations in pronoun address, as "Going to them, happy letter" to the Ns (c.early 1862) and "Going to Him! Happy letter" on an additional retained copy (c.late summer 1862)" (775).

Tell Her, I only said - the Syntax -
And left the Verb and the Pronoun – out!
Tell Her just how the fingers – hurried -
Then - how they – stammered - slow - slow -
And then – you wished you had eyes – in your pages -
So you could see – what moved – them so -

Tell Her - it was'nt a Practiced Writer -
You guessed –
From the way the sentence – toiled -
You could here the Boddice – tug – behind you –
As if it held but the might of a Child -
You almost pitied – it - you - it worked so -
Tell Her - No - you may quibble – there -
For it would split Her Heart – to know it -
And then – you and I – were silenter!

Tell Her – Day – finished - before we – finished -
And the old Clock kept neighing “Day”!
And you - got sleepy -
And begged to be ended -
What could – it hinder so - to -say?
Tell Her - just how she sealed – you - Cautious!
But - if she ask “where you are hid” – until the evening –
Ah! Be bashful!
Gesture Coquette –
And shake your Head! (M529-530)

Dickinson wrote three versions of this poem. The first was sent to her Norcross cousins, but that manuscript is now lost so there is no way to know if this poem was the letter or if it was posted with one. The second version is lost. The third was folded with the rest of her papers in a piece of notepaper addressed to her friend Samuel Bowles, but never sent. On this basis and from the very beginning, the poem strikes us with an ambiguity: we cannot know exactly what genre it is speaking about. It could be referring to an actual letter to which this poem is an appendix, but, also, to the poem itself.

The first line involves something that appears repeatedly in the previous poems: it starts with a movement of sending that puts the poem out there, performatively, which is accomplished by the first words: “Going to Her.” The second line commences a series of instructions that the speaker, who in this case is also the writer, gives the letter. Basically, the letter must inform the recipient of elements that have been omitted: an unwritten page, a verb and a pronoun. The last two recall her frequent grammatical omissions, but, more significantly, by also stating that she has omitted an unwritten or blank page a difference between omission and concealment comes forth: these omissions have nothing to hide. Dickinson’s poems develop a notion of secrecy that is, at times, more inclined to omission than concealment. In one poem she writes: “The Suburbs of a Secret/A Strategist should keep -...” (M548). These words stress the exteriority or boundaries of the secret rather than its content. A secret, in this context, should thus be understood distinctively as a limit that thwarts communication. This makes sense in the context of a poetics that doesn’t attempt to disclose content, but rather to expose the limits of reception. Lines six and seven refer to the difficult (sober, austere) labor of writing, which exhausted the writer’s stammering (wading is the alternative word) fingers. These two lines are used to highlight the partiality of the letter as a witness: it cannot bear witness to everything involved in writing it because it is also affected by the impassable “suburbs of secrecy,” which affirm the singularity and separation between the one who writes, metonymically represented by the fingers, and the other (the letter).

The second stanza says much more about Dickinson’s writing practice than many other poems. The speaker uses the same tone that Dickinson sometimes used in her own letters when she deceived recipients by telling them that she wrote much less than she actually did.³⁸ This is precisely how the stanza begins: the author instructs the letter to excuse its lack of expertise in writing. However, whilst she explains the ways she fails we are really being told what expert writing means for Dickinson: a constant tightening, an art of abbreviation. In this way, writing is not associated to weaving, as literary tradition usually holds on the basis of the etymological origin of the word “text” (*textus*: thing woven, *texere*: to weave), but to tugging. The comparison allows us to affirm

³⁸ After Emily Dickinson asked for and received Thomas Higginson’s opinion on four poems, she replied: “Thank you for the surgery – it was not so painful as I supposed (...). You asked how old I was? I made no verse – but one or two – until this winter – Sir –” (L261 404). This letter was written in 1862, Dickinson had written hundreds of poems before that and was also an active epistolary writer.

that negation plays a more important role than production. Therefore, by excusing itself for failing to pull tight enough, as if it could have omitted more, the speaker reveals the technique that Dickinson uses to send out little boats that can only go adrift. In fact, this reflection on the writer's expertise is interrupted by a new instruction that is itself interrupted by a hesitation, one that will set the reader, the instructed letter and the poem adrift. The poem, at this point, is tugged with great strength: "Tell Her - No -, you may quibble there."

This line is the strongest and most dangerous of the poem. It conducts the drives of epistolary correspondence toward the blast of finitude. The speaker would like to say something that might put the vulnerable reader in emotional or physical danger, but believes the letter would not take such a risk. If it did, line 18 suggests, it would make them *silenter* (this is also a grammatical transgression: she turns silence into a comparative adjective). If the reader goes silent, so will the letter. We've witnessed this movement of correspondence in other poems: it alludes to the contagious relationship of expenditure that suspends or displaces the subjects' self-presence. Because of this, there is yet another way to read this: "- No -" might not be a hesitation but the movement of loss that the letter delivers in the impossibility of arrival. No, then, as when Dickinson writes to Otis P. Lord: "Don't you know that you are happiest when I withhold and not confer – don't you know that 'No' is the wildest word we consign to language?" (L562 617) This is the most crucial determination of Dickinson's poetics: to invest in loss through that wild word that thwarts the possibility of the letter's complete arrival and ensures the tragedy of destination.

Many of her poems state that "Dust is the only secret - / Death - the only one" (M100) and it cannot be conferred, which is why "No" is the syllable she ascribes to that *wild* secret: "The Living – tell –/ *The Dying – but a syllable –* The Coy Dead – None – " (My emphasis, F543 M297). From this perspective, the syllable that the letter is instructed to carry exposes finitude and introduces loss in a poetics of reception which rejects gain, power and recognition. The third stanza starts by referring to the unfinished ending of the letter. Omission is also referred to. The speaker tells the letter to take the blame for not being able to stay up until she finished writing, so that the reader will understand that something was left out. Since the speaker wonders what the rest of the letter would have said it is more likely that what is omitted is unknown. This reinforces

the idea and particularity of Dickinson's secrets: like dying, they are void of content (but not of significance).

In the next line a new element is introduced. The speaker, who previously referred to herself as the writer of the letter in the first person, suddenly refers to the person responsible of sealing the letter in the second person, as "she." This is both suggestive and mysterious. On the one hand, the letter has been constantly sealed throughout the poem, in fact, it is a letter about seals and what is not accessible. From this point of view, "tell her how *she* sealed you" refers to the different omissions and more specifically to how the lyrical "I" was displaced in the process of writing the poem, leaving itself out as it traced its limits, inscribing itself away from what was inscribed, an erasure affirmed by the use of this pronoun. On the other hand, maybe the speaker is introducing a third subject, not the writer who would ultimately be a fiction created by the speaker, but the writer who was never part of the poem, who is a she and is called Emily Dickinson, who is not the representative of the verse, but the body outside it that ultimately seals the envelope, puts it away and mails it the next day. This situates the poet at the border of every poem and letter, sending it off yet not going with it, a sign of its incompleteness.

The final lines ask the letter to keep a secret: not to tell the recipient where she kept it before it was sent. In this way, they reinforce the importance of concealment and omission throughout the poem. But, at the same time, they trouble us with another problem: that particular stage in which a poem finds itself when it has been sealed and not yet sent. Is it already going to the other anyways? Is "she" still committed to it? This disquieting stage is where Dickinson's *oeuvre* was found.

Throughout this chapter I hope to have shown that Dickinson's poetry sets writing against itself; it occupies space on the pages only to make more space. In her work, the drives of epistolary correspondence converge with an understanding of language that exposes the negativity of dying. As a result, readers relate to the poems and their speakers through loss instead of presence and gain. We encounter a transgressive and critical way of dealing with literary communication that challenges our understanding and practice of acts of reading that are grounded on self-presence and intersubjectivity, as well as the way in which we are used to publishing, circulating and commercializing literary works. Dickinson's paradoxical decision to invest in loss at different levels, and

especially in her structures of address, turn her writing into a significant literary site to think through the unworking relationships and communication that Nancy and Blanchot reflect on. The aim of chapter four is to make these relations explicit. For now, in the following chapter, I will present and explore how Celan's understanding of poetic address relates to incompleteness, since his poems also propose challenging and incomplete modes of reception and relation that are marked by finitude.

3. The Darkness Slingshot

“You with the darkness slingshot
You with the stone”
—Celan

The Meridian is a speech Paul Celan gave when he received the Georg Büchner literary award in 1960. He spent at least a year preparing it—jotting down notes, writing different drafts and reading and translating texts from other writers in the meantime. In this chapter, I will argue that the speech is, paradoxically, an *ars poetica* that is not written by an author but by a reader, one not centered on *poiesis* but on reception, and where listening and addressing overlap. This gives way to an unworking understanding of the poem in terms very similar to the way in which Nancy conceives of literary communism: an unending address that is never self-enclosed or originary. Many passages of this speech, in which Celan seems to be speaking as an author, are actually transcriptions of his reactions, as a reader, to the work of the Russian poet Osip Mandelstam (1891-1938). Celan translated Mandelstam’s poetry collection *Stone* between 1957 and 1959. As he prepared *The Meridian*, he also wrote a commissioned essay on Mandelstam for the National German Radio; some fragments of this essay are literarily transcribed into the speech, which is why Pierre Joris includes it in *The Meridian Final Version-Drafts-Materials* edition (2011). On this basis, I will also argue that the speech metapoetically develops the question of unworking address and reception. This way, it challenges our understanding of the poet as a self-present and self-enclosed creative subject, and of the poem as the product of an author.

To unfold the underlying paradox of the poet as a reader, I will present another one: that *The Meridian* defines the poetic event around sending, reception and encounter, as it simultaneously questions legibility and moves away from a concern with comprehension and the communication of meaning. This is a result of the connection that Celan, in dialogue with Martin Heidegger, makes between language and mortality. Thus, we will see how his poetry is cut across by silence and incompleteness, and how readers –and authors– are faced with the illegible instead of a legibility that would lead to the recognition of meaning or to the possibility of cocreation and intersubjectivity. For these reasons, *The Meridian* presents another way in which unworking relationships happen when poetic address and finitude are connected.

Joris claims that Celan first began to signal a change in his poetics around 1958 (“Introduction” xli). Around this time, he concluded that poetry was neither a matter of transfiguration, redemption, nor an autonomous aesthetic sphere (xliii). His books *Sprachgitter* (1959), *Die Niemandrose*, written between 1959 and 1963, and even *Atemwende* (1967), would consolidate this stance. *The Bremen Address* (1958), the famous letter to Hans Bender (1960) and *The Meridian* are part of a reorientation of his poetic quest. And so are his translations of ten Dickinson poems, which were published between 1959 and 1963. During these years he separated himself from the modernist lyric and concrete poetry movements followed by many of his contemporaries and cleared a different path for postwar European poetry.

This chapter is divided into three sections. The introduction follows the development of Celan’s poetic quest in order to understand why he felt close to Mandelstam’s poetics, and what led him to develop a notion of a receptive, yet incomplete, poetic encounter. Over the last 20 years scholars have started to acknowledge the extent to which Celan’s readings and translations of Mandelstam’s essays and poems played a role in the development of his own poetics (Ryland, 2010; Glazova, 2008; Eskin, 2000). His presence is especially discernible in the period that I am interested in. Eskin recalls that the Russian poet’s work “had a profound impact on Celan’s poetry following the publication of *Sprachgitter* [1959] (...) and, most significantly, on his poetic cycle *Die Niemandrose* [1963]” (Eskin 13), which is dedicated to him. Therefore, it is necessary to pay close attention to Celan’s engagement with Mandelstam’s work in order to reflect critically on his poetics after 1959.

In the second section I develop core issues of *The Meridian*, such as the relationships between art and poetry, as well as between language and finitude. I argue that the realm of art is, above all, a realm of non-responsiveness which poetry interrupts in a very peculiar way: at the limit of meaning and by a paradoxical overlap of address and reception that exposes finitude. This section presents and analyzes the key concepts that will be developed in the last section: “The Black Earth.” Here I refer explicitly to the way Mandelstam’s works and ideas are incorporated into Celan’s speech. At the same time, I show how Celan’s understanding of poetic address unworks communication and the subjects involved in the poetic event by exposing finitude. The poem is thus a phenomenon to be perceived, but one that manifests between voices that fall silent in reaching each other. In this way, each poem becomes a neutral site that nobody can

claim, even though it is a personal site in which both the author and reader are equally present and are equally commencing “a route into nothingness” (*MDM*³⁹ 199). As a metaspeech, this movement is exemplified by the relation between the words of Mandelstam and Celan in the speech itself.

Arguing that *The Meridian* is more about Büchner than Celan himself—and thus dismissing the idea that for Celan “himself” is not a self—Müller-Sievers criticizes studies that claim that the speech is about Celan’s own poetics, but which, in his eyes, don’t show “how the poetological statements in the speech can be ‘applied’ either to individual poems in Celan’s corpus, to certain motives in the collection, or to periods of Celan’s work” (132). In order to respond to his criticism, this last section includes close readings of four poems.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Paul Celan was born on the 23 of November 1920 in Czernowitz, Romania. This city was taken by the Red Army in 1940, by the Nazis in 1941, and again by the Soviets in 1944. His Jewish parents were murdered in the Transnistria death camp in 1942 and he endured two years of forced labor in Moldavia until released in 1944. He then moved from Czernowitz to Bucharest and Vienna; during this time, he changed his name from Antschel to Celan and published his famous poem “*Todesfuge*.” It was published in a Romanian translation, since he originally wrote it in German, the language that Fritz Antschel, his mother, loved and insisted on being spoken at home; even though the family also spoke Romanian, Ukrainian and Yiddish. After Vienna, he moved to Paris and lived there from 1948 until 1970, when he jumped from the Pont Mirabeau into the Seine. It took nine days to find his body.

When I think of his death I see his body covered in stones floating in a similar way to how Ovid recounts that Orpheus’s head and lyre floated along the Hebrus river after his body was dismembered by the Maenads. The presence of stones in this picture is surely indebted to the idea of sinking, as well as to the Jewish tradition of putting small stones on graves. But it is also indebted to Celan’s proximity with Mandelstam, who famously proclaimed that words had to “return the stoneness to the stone!” With this proclamation Mandelstam defined one of the main characteristics of Acmeism: to treat

³⁹ Abbreviation of Celan, Paul. *The Meridian. Final Version-Drafts-Materials*. Translated by Pierre Joris, eds. Bernhard Böschstein & H.Schmull. Stanford UP, 2011.

poems as events that disclose existence. In Celan's own words: "[a]cm.<eism>: To lead language into closeness with being" (*MDM* 112).

Acmeism is a literary movement from the Silver Age of Russian poetry, which refers to the symbolist and post-symbolist movements (acmeism and futurism) that developed in Russia in the late Nineteenth Century and throughout the Twentieth. The emergence of the "Elder" symbolists "was marked by Merezhkovsky's collection of poems (...) *Symbols* (1893)" (Gasparov 2). The primary source for the concept of the symbol that was incorporated into this literary tradition was Baudelaire's poem "Correspondences" (1857). Mandelstam refers to this poem directly in his essay "Morning of Acmeism:" "We do not want to distract ourselves with a stroll through the 'forest of symbols' because we have a denser, more virgin forest-divine physiology, the infinite complexity of our own dark organism" (63). With these words he responds to the Russian symbolists, and also to one of the main precursors of modernism, Baudelaire himself. This passage brings down to earth the "forest of symbols" that "Correspondences" describes as having "the power to expand into infinity." Acmeists aren't concerned with expanding to the infinite, but with retraction, concentration, attention to what already exists *temporally*, like our own dark organism.

According to the scholar Gasparov, in "Correspondences:"

The symbols flutter with metamorphoses, showing themselves in a variety of appearances –as colors, sounds, odors, whose suggestive and elusive resemblances (or 'correspondences') carry the promise of an ultimate wholeness of the transcendent realm of the spirit, which finds in them fragmented and scattered representations. (3)

Thus, for a symbolist, "any particular phenomenon appears to be wrapped in a web of associations;" things do not exist for their own sake but "as a means for spreading echoes into the infinite" (3). For Mandelstam, the problem is specifically that symbolist poetry bifurcates the sign in a transcendent maze that seeks what lies beyond the limits of human experience and beyond the existence of the things themselves. In a later essay, "On the Nature of the Word" (1922), he describes the problem with symbolism as follows: "Perception is demoralized. Nothing is real, genuine. Nothing is left but a terrifying quadrille of 'correspondences,' all nodding to one another. Eternal winking. (...) The rose nods to the girl, the girl to the rose. No one wants to be himself" (128). On this account it's not surprising that acmeism was initially to be called "adamism" in order to stress "the directness of meaning with which Adam had originally bestowed

names on all the phenomena around him” (Gasparov 9). Instead they chose acmeism, which locates the movement within a modernist tradition: the Greek word *acme* (ἀκμή) refers to the pinnacle, cutting edge or foremost state and, in this context, it stands as an “allegiance to the upper crust of meaning, in contradistinction to the symbolists metaphysical depths” (9). In a rigorous investigation on the reception of *Baudelaire in Russia*, Adrian Wanner writes: “the acmeists rejected the symbolist quest for transcendence in favor of a clearly delineated depiction of earthly reality (...) Baudelaire had to be understood as a sort of pre-acmeist” (174).

It is important to consider why Baudelaire was the chosen interlocutor in this dialogue between the Russians (symbolists as well as post symbolists) and the French symbolists. Wanner affirms that he “was virtually the only French poet who played a significant role in the Russian decadence of the 1890’s and also in the symbolist movement of the 1900’s” (121). He was an attentive observer of modern life, and his system of correspondences reacted to the development of the city, to the loss of the sacred and to the opening of the profane –in society and in literature. His work represents an epoch in which values shifted in different ways that were more than familiar to the Russians, whose window to a secular modernity was open since Peter the Great whilst, at the same time, power and social order were preserved in old fashioned ways for a very long time.

To have a window open onto the rapidly changing ways of the West at the same time as power was still in the hands of the Tsarist autocracy shaped a strange and anachronistic society in which the forces of the transitory and the eternal, of the profane and the sacred, were in tension. The result: inequality, poverty and injustice. Therefore, for the Russian “painters of modern life” art was also a means to question, represent and transform the values of an epoch, but unlike the French symbolists, they also represented a constant threat to the instituted orders. As we know, Pushkin, Lermontov, Tsvetaeva and Mandelstam are only some of the names of writers who lived in exile at least once either under the Tsarist or the Soviet regimes. In fact, the first poet to translate Baudelaire into Russian was Pyotr Filippovich Yakubovich (1860-1911), a revolutionary poet who was serving time in Siberia. According to Wanner, “Baudelaire’s poetic revolution was largely ignored by his early Russian translators, who seemed mainly preoccupied with the alleged ‘message’ of his poems” (20). This is significant because it

shows us that the Russians were first drawn to Baudelaire politically (Wanner 41). However, the emphasis shifted with the symbolists.

Baudelaire is also an important pre-acmeist reference for Mandelstam, because even though the acmeists rejected the transcendent element of symbolist correspondences, they transformed this web of associations into another type of web: a cultural one. To raise “a phenomenon to the tenth power” (Mandelstam 61), poets must take into account all the cultural echoes and meanings that determine it:

the proclaimed return to substances did not mean (...) that what acmeists promoted was only direct, unmediated meanings. For them, “tangible” meant grounded in culture. A word might resound with a multitude of meanings, provided that each of them could be placed in its authentic cultural “home.” (Gasparov 10)

Mandelstam’s acmeism privileges the correspondences between these cultural “homes” over the words’ content. This is why he writes: “Love the existence of the thing more than the thing itself and your own existence more than yourself: that is acmeism’s highest commandment” (64). It is only in existence that we hear the world resonating.

We must keep this in mind to adequately understand why Celan defines acmeism as a way that leads language into closeness with being. A line from a poem included in *Snowpart* says: “I hear the stone stand in you” (*BIT*⁴⁰ 351). Here the speaker of the poem stresses the singularity of the addressee’s existence. The image of the stone—tied to the cultural tradition followed by Celan—represents the real, the genuine and the perceivable (as defined by Mandelstam). At the same time, the line stresses the phenomenality of words themselves. In German “stone” and “stand” are phonetically similar; consequently, the line “*bör ich den Stein in dir stehn*” also suggests that the word “*Stein*” can be heard in the word “*stehn*.” If we read them aloud we hear that their only difference lies in the way the vowels sound, which in English can be pronounced as -i- and -ee- respectively. This gives rise to a polysemic play of correspondences amongst both words and the reader they address.

The centrality that Celan gives to this type of “existential correspondences” explains why he felt closer to Mandelstam than to most of his German contemporaries, who are best represented by the figure of Gottfried Benn. In 1951, Benn gave a lecture

⁴⁰ Abbreviation of Celan, Paul. *Breathturn Into Timestead. The Collected Later Poetry*. Translated by Pierre Joris, Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2014.

on lyric poetry in which he claimed poetry was monological and also reconnected postwar German poetry with the European tradition through the figure of Mallarmé. Celan scholars agree that *The Meridian* is partly a response and a rejection of Benn's ideas. For Celan's contemporaries, Mallarmé's legacy is formalist and impersonal; it prioritizes the materiality of the word over address and finite existence, matters that Celan claims poetry must deal with in response to the catastrophe of his epoch. In *The Meridian* we find a statement in which he relates postwar German poetry to how Mallarmé has been received:

Doesn't Büchner (...) propose (...) a truly radical calling-into-question of art? (...) A calling-into-question to which all of today's poetry has to return if we want to question further? (...) [M]ay we, as happens in many places these days, start from art as something given and absolutely unconditional, should we before all, to put it most concretely, think—let's say—Mallarmé through to the end? (*MDM* 5)

For Celan, calling "today's poetry" into question implies that Mallarmé's reception should be called into question. In a draft note of the speech he describes the difference between his own poetic quest and the French poet's legacy:

In the poem: that, I believe, does not mean (...), n'en déplaît à Mallarmé, in one of those phonetically, semantically and syntactically over-differentiated language structures assembled from "words" (...). Not in the poem that sees itself as "word music;" not in any "mood poetry" woven from various "timbres" (...) not in the poem as a result of word-creations, word-concretions, word-destructions, word-games; not in any new "expressive art form"; nor in the poem as in a "second" reality that would heighten the real symbolically. (...) Rather in the poem as the poem of the one who speaks under the angle of inclination of his Being...(55)

This categorical list describes the aspects of Mallarmé's poetics that Celan's contemporaries inherited, transformed and reproduced—lyric poets like Benn himself, or the concrete poets (whose first German speaking poet was Eugen Gomringer). Celan resisted this plastic and lyric approach to poetry because his writing was motivated by a concern with temporality, finitude and pain, which demanded a reflection on the complexities of language and communication in the aftermath of the Holocaust. In the *Bremen Address* he stated that, in the midst of losses, language remained:

But it had to pass through its own answerlessness, pass through a frightful muting, pass through the thousand darkneses of death bringing speech. It passed through and gave back no words for that which happened; yet it passed through this happening. Passed through and could come to light again, “enriched” by all this. (*SPP*⁴¹ 395)

One should always have this passage in mind when approaching Celan’s work. The change his poetics goes through is a matter of orientation in a language that stopped speaking and only brought death upon the world. He defines this “frightful muting” as an *answerlessness*, as if this death bringing speech were a one-sided speech with no need for interlocutors. The other was not given a chance to answer. It is important to stress that at this point Celan’s diagnosis of language and discourse under Nazism is that it lacks response and reception. In the years before 1958, starting with the publication of “*Todesfuge*” in 1947, Celan confronts the Holocaust by addressing issues like the memory of the dead, the community that died, murder, mourning and suffering, but in time his reflection stops giving centrality to meaning and is reoriented to poetic address and reception. This is one of the main reasons he is drawn to the Russian poet. Celan finds a way to start answering to his contemporaries, and to the Holocaust, with Mandelstam’s critique and transformation of symbolism into “existential resonances.”

In a draft note from *The Meridian* he writes: “The poems of Osip Mandelstam are the poems of someone who perceives, attentively, turned toward what appears (...) questioning and addressing what appears; they are conversation” (*MDM* 70). Here he brings up two main aspects of his own poetics. First, that response or receptivity are tied to the perception of what appears before us—for Celan, this refers to the singular utterance of the poem, and the senses that are privileged are seeing and hearing. Second: the question of dialogue. The condition of possibility in both cases is address. And what turns address into an *existential* resonance (instead of, say, the means of transmission of a message) is the awareness of finitude that comes with it.

Heidegger and Buber influenced him strongly in this regard: the first in relation to finitude and the second regarding address. This is why I will return to their work throughout the chapter whenever they are helpful to understand and put into context some of his statements, even though Celan doesn’t quote either of them directly in the speech. Celan’s library held fifteen books written by Buber and three about him. His first

⁴¹ Abbreviation for: Celan, Paul. *Selected Poems and Prose of Paul Celan*. Translated by John Felstiner, W.W. Norton & Co., 2001.

recorded reading of this Jewish dialogist dates back to 1940; they finally met in 1960, in what has since been known to have truly been a failed encounter, unlike the one with Heidegger in 1967 which has been distorted and misinterpreted.⁴² Celan's first readings of Heidegger date back to 1951 and continue until his death in 1970. There were more books by Heidegger in his library than by any other author.

In 1960 Celan wrote to Herman Kasack: "Aren't poems exactly this? The infinite-saying of mortality and nothingness that remains mindful of its finitude" (*MDM* 222). The idea of the infinite conjoined by a hyphen to the action of saying is a paradox since language itself is a border. Rather than to *the* infinite, this refers to the action of repeating over and over again. Furthermore, what is being said repeatedly is also about limits: to be aware of finitude and nothingness. This is the core of Celan's work from 1959 on: it discloses the finitude of who is speaking, of who is spoken to, of what is spoken about and of the way in which poetic language speaks—mindful of mortality. This is the core element of his poetics, because along with the awareness of finitude comes the singularity and difference of each being.

In the biography, *Poet, Survivor, Jew* (1995), John Felstiner recalls an experience in the reception of "Death Fugue" that would be crucial for Celan and which is exemplary of the change his poetry goes through. This poem, originally called "Tango of Death" to recall the songs that imprisoned victims would play as others would work and be exterminated in the camps, narrates the death camp routine through images and symbols. It speaks about the death ("black milk") that was consummated day and night. It also describes the way in which the prisoners were murdered: "he shouts scrape your strings darker you'll rise up as smoke to the sky / you'll then have a grave in the clouds there you won't lie too cramped" (*SPP* 33). And it narrates historical facts while simultaneously depicting a political situation: the German nation, represented in the poem by Goethe, the man who plays with snakes and writes about Margareta's golden

⁴² In *Paul Celan and Martin Heidegger. An Unresolved Conversation* (2006), Lyon convincingly makes the case that most "readers have distorted the content of the poem [Celan's "Todtnauberg"] and the entire relationship that preceded and followed it" (172). To begin he points out that scholars don't specify that when Celan visited the philosopher for the first time (and this is another point: they met two more times) in Freiburg in the summer of 1967 "he was on leave of absence from confinement in a psychiatric clinic to which he returned after the visit" (160). Lyon attributes to Celan's mental disorder the fact that he changed his version of the encounter as time passed, because the first version is recorded in a letter he wrote to his wife, Gisèle Lestrangé, which says: "I hope that Heidegger will take his pen and write a few pages echoing (the conversation), that will be a warning in view of resurgent Nazism" (167). For Lyon this passage proves that things could not have gone as badly as we believe today and that the discussion Celan was expecting to have was in fact had.

hair (Margareta from *Faust*), in opposition to the people of Israel, represented in the poem by Sulamith's hair of ashes (a character from the *Song of Songs*).

Even though Celan was in a forced labor camp when the deportations came to an end and was not the survivor of a death camp, Felstiner says that the use of the first person and the poem's "first title, 'Tango of Death', made the poem feel like a reliable piece of evidence; it meant that this person knew what he was talking about, that he was probably there and that he must have written the poem there as well" (*Poet, Survivor, Jew* 59). Hence, the poem was interpreted as a testimony of historical facts and was institutionalized in German schools. In 1957, a German magazine published a report about the experience of teaching the poem in which a teacher interviewed some of her students. "When the teacher asked: 'Do you have the feeling that the poem is an accusation?' [The students] protested unanimously: 'It contains forgiveness and reconciliation'" (178). Afterwards, the article stated that the poem "helped the German youth confront the dark forces of our history... understand them, dominate them, overcome them" (178). This type of redeeming response drove Celan away from writing poems that made people believe they were equivalent to knowing and understanding what had happened.

In this line of thought, he also started to develop the idea that poems were not even a means to inform or send a message ("Poems: no 'message' no 'information'" he wrote in a note from *The Meridian* (MDM 162)). This determined the rest of his work and serves as another explanation of his tense, broken and resistant language. In an article written only one year after Celan's death, Lyon already described some aspects that had changed since he had first started writing as follows: "reduction of long lines to monosyllabic lines; drastic reduction in length of poems; elimination of most titles; disappearance of dream imagery..." ("Paul Celan and Martin Buber" 114).

The end of a poem from *Die Niemandrose*, "Tübingen, January," describes this language at its extreme point:

Came, if there
came a man
came a man to the world, today,
with the patriarchs'
light-beard: he would,
if he spoke of this

time, he
 could
 only babble and babble
 every- ever-
 moremore.

(“Pallaksch. Pallaksch.”)

(SPP 159)⁴³

If we cannot speak for others or about their experience, and if reality can’t and shouldn’t be overcome, we can only babble, *ever-, ever- moremore*. *Pallaksch* is a stutter that was invented by Hölderlin when he was living in a tower in Tübingen and had let his beard grow in the light of the Patriarchs. He used the word to say yes, no, or insult people. It’s more like a sound than a word, but it is a word and it has no unique meaning. *Pallaksch* breaks up the sign: it is a signifier without a definite signified. In this sense it is very similar to a word that Primo Levi recalls in his testimony *If This is a Man*, which was pronounced by a young boy named Hurbinek whom he encountered at the death camp: *massklo*. Giorgio Agamben reads this part of Levi’s testimony as follows:

“They all listen and try to decipher that sound (...) but, despite the presence of all the languages of Europe in the camp, Hurbinek’s word remains obstinately secret. “No, it was certainly not a message, it was not a revelation; perhaps it was his name, if it had ever fallen to his lot to be given a name; perhaps (...) it meant ‘to eat’ or ‘bread,’ or perhaps ‘meat’ (...). Hurbinek, the nameless (...). Nothing remains of him: he bears witness through these words of mine’ (Levi 1986: 192)

Perhaps this was the secret word that Levi discerned in the “background noise” of Celan’s poetry. And yet in Auschwitz, Levi nevertheless attempted to listen to that which no one has borne witness, to gather the secret word: *mass-klo* or *matisklo*. Perhaps every word, every writing is born, in this sense, as a testimony. This is why what is borne witness to cannot already be language or writing. It can only be something to which no one has borne witness. (...) And this is the sound that arises from the lacuna, the non-language that one speaks when one is alone, the non-language to which language

⁴³ “Käme, / käme ein Mensch, / käme ein Mensch zur Welt, heute, mit / dem Lichtbart der / Patriarchen: er dürfte, / spräch er von dieser / Zeit, er / dürfte / nur lallen und lallen, / immer-, immer- / zuzu. // (“Pallaksch. Pallaksch”)” (PC 163). All German versions of the poems are taken from the bilingual edition: Celan, Paul. *Obras Completas*. Translated by José Luis Reina Palazón, Trotta, 2007. From now on abbreviated as *PC*.

answers (...) It is necessary to reflect on the nature of that to which no one has borne witness, on this non-language. (Agamben 38)

For Celan, *massklo* or *pallakesch* is the path that poetry must follow. It bears witness to singularity; it shares what can be communicated in its very resistance. In the context of testimony, Celan, like Levi, is concerned with stepping away from historical facts that, despite being extremely important in terms of legality, justice and official recognition, don't account for pain. Their language is closer to the "non-language," which is common to both testimonies and poetry. In this direction we may understand an affirmation made by Derrida in "Politics and Poetics of Witnessing," according to which every testimony entails an experience of poetic language (66), an unredeemable darkness. This is important because it allows us to see that there is something specific to the poetic function that also characterizes the language of bearing witness: this is, that language is also non-communicative. Even though Celan's position in this regard is undoubtedly an effect of the linguistic aftermath of the Holocaust, he encounters a theoretical explication for it in Heidegger's "The Nature of Language," which he read in 1959:⁴⁴

But when does language speak itself as language? Curiously enough, when we cannot find the right word for something that concerns us, carries us away, oppresses us or encourages us. Then we leave unspoken what we have in mind and, without rightly giving it thought, undergo moments in which language itself has distantly and fleetingly touched us with its essential being. (59)

Heidegger wants to make the point that the essential being of language is also what goes unheard, language's own withdrawal. It is also proper of language to be non-phenomenal — and if we stretch this idea a bit beyond Heidegger himself, language is both what it is and what it's not (that which withdraws or resists). In this sense, *massklo* is a representative word of these shared orders of language.

For Celan and Heidegger, poetic language encounters the limits of communicability because it is the language of a person, a mortal, who speaks.⁴⁵ But for Celan the limits of the speaker and of language only arise in an encounter with the other. In a letter from 1959 addressed to Ingeborg Bachman, he writes: "Camerado, this is no Book. Who touches this, touches a man! I fear that the soul extensions extending to

⁴⁴ This essay was included in *On the Way to Language*, which Heidegger published in 1959 and sent to Celan personally. The poet recorded reading it that same year, only one before *The Meridian* was composed.

⁴⁵ This is discussed in further detail in the second section of this chapter.

one's fingertips have long since been operationally removed from most people—in the name of human relations, incidentally...” (Bachman & Celan 174). In this fragment, Celan intertextually refers to his own fingertips, which have touched Walt Whitman's since he is quoting a passage from the poem “So Long” of *Leaves of Grass*:

Camerado, this is no book,
Who touches this touches a man,
(Is it night? Are we here together alone?)
It is I you hold and who holds you,
I spring from the pages into your arms—decease calls me forth. (824)

This poem is about reception, and the last line makes a strange or unexpected reference to finitude, which must have drawn Celan to it even more, if not entirely, since it implies that finitude is what drives the poetic encounter. The fingertips with which we are meant to flip the pages and silently underline the words, over and again if necessary, are the central point of Celan's poetics; they are points of contact, passage and singularity.

Part of Celan's poetic task consists in developing a notion of poetic encounter in which nothing can be redeemed in the sense that it resists any notion of exchange. It is a poetics of the unredeemable, like a forged check. Meaning is not transferred from one person to another; it's neither given nor received. And what is given –awareness of finitude, the singularity of one in the difference of the other, is impossible to receive, because, like poetic language, it withdraws. In this sense his finger tips are more like the ones described by Mandelstam in “The Word and Culture” than those of Whitman, as they seek the verges: “Write imageless verges if you can (...) a blind man recognizes a face by barely touching it with seeing fingers” (Mandelstam 116).

Celan was always concerned with mourning the mass murder of the Jewish community that he belonged to and, in a very deep sense, with mourning the German language too. But the reflection on the limits of communication, otherness and finitude became core to his poetics during the period in which the ideas of *The Meridian* were starting to be developed, which is why there are many twentieth century and contemporary continental philosophers who acknowledge the way Celan's speech transgresses a metaphysical tradition centered on presence, recognition and self-sameness. Those who contribute most to the questions of my investigation are Christopher Fynsk, Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jacques Derrida. In “The Realities at

Stake in a Poem: Celan's Bremen and Darmstadt Addresses,"⁴⁶ Fynsk explores the Celan-Heidegger relationship and points to a way in which Celan follows Heidegger but also takes a step aside. He stresses something I discussed in reference to Nancy in chapter one, which is that Celan goes one step further than Heidegger by relating being-towards death to being-with:

...we may conclude that he [Celan] is pushing Heidegger's thought of finitude to the point of recognizing that the difference can only be thought as occurring or opening *in relation*, in always singular relations (and thus thought as always differing from itself). The difference, then, is to be understood in the manner of what Jean-Luc Nancy refers to as a *partage*. (173)⁴⁷

This is what makes Celan's reference to Whitman in the Bachman letter stand out—and makes it just the right passage to describe his poetry: "It is I you hold, and who holds you; / I spring from the pages into your arms—decease calls me forth."

Lacoue-Labarthe reflects on *The Meridian* in "Catastrophe," a chapter of a book on Celan called *Poetry as Experience*. He provides a valuable close reading of the speech, particularly of the way Celan relates art and poetry. He describes poetry as an interruption of art, which he lucidly interprets as the realm of the banished singularity of the subject. Lacoue-Labarthe speaks about singularity in Heideggerian terms. When he refers to the way in which poetry recovers singularity, he writes: "In the counter-word, or rather through the 'counter' of the counter-word the possibility of death 'resolutely' opens up, as does something like what Heidegger calls, with respect to *Dasein*, its 'ownmost possibility.' And from that point on exist—these are Celan's words—'fate' and 'direction'" (55). The counter-word, as we will soon see, refers to the words pronounced by Lucile, a character from Büchner's *Danton's Death*, when Camille (her husband) is about to be executed in the Revolution Square.⁴⁸ Her words are

⁴⁶ In this text Fynsk also briefly suggests that the way poems work for Celan is an appropriation of the way Heidegger describes *The Origin of the Work of Art*. However, he does not develop this thought further and I don't think he could go too far, because in that text Heidegger beautifully describes how a work of art makes sense and how its meaning arises, but he explains it only from within the work itself, from its movements of resistance and disclosure (earth and world), and does not take into account the reception of the work nor what happens to the singularity of the poet (it would be the painter) once the work is on the way to the other, all crucial features of Celan's poetics. The way in which Heidegger leaves the painter and the recipient out of his reflection in fact situate his reflections on art on a path closer to the modernist poets and movements that Celan tried to break away from.

⁴⁷ I will address the relationship between Nancy's *partage* and Celan's poetics in the last chapter of this thesis, for now I just want to explain why I value Fynsk's Heideggerian approach to the speech.

⁴⁸ Historically, Anne Lucile Philippe Laridon Duplessis (1760-1794) was arrested and executed for trying to free her husband, Camille Desmoulins, from imprisonment.

representative of the realm of poetry for Celan: they interrupt the reigning logic and recover the singularity that had been banished, the *stone that stands in you*.

The only problem with this study is that Lacoue-Labarthe doesn't read thoroughly the passages in *The Meridian* that don't deal with singularity, especially those dealing with dialogue and address. In fact, in the chapter that precedes "Catastrophe," he writes that "[w]e must avoid confusing this [the question of singularity] with another, relatively secondary or derivative question, that of the 'readable' and the 'unreadable'" (15). The weakness of "Catastrophe" is precisely that Celan is not only philosophizing about singularity but speaking (and philosophizing too) about poetry at a particular point in history in which the question of what is readable and unreadable is not derivative but elemental to the question of singularity. In this regard I agree more with a position like Nicholas Meyerhofer's, who, albeit categorically, states that this speech "could be described as threefold in design: it is an attempt to convey Celan's personal hopes for contemporary poetry; it is a characterization of the latter; and finally, it is an attempted description of the poetic experience itself" (73).

Derrida has written significantly on Celan and addresses *The Meridian* in two complementary texts: "Shibboleth for Paul Celan" and "Majesties." In the first, he creatively addresses the problem of singularity by reflecting on the significance of dates in Celan's work; specifically on the singularity and the loss of singularity they go through when they become readable. "Majesties" is a lesser known text in which Derrida points out that the "secret of encounter," which is where Celan says each poem is headed, is at the same time its condition of possibility, its *savoir faire*, as well as what "in the present itself, in the very presentation of the poem (...) continues to remain secret (...) a phenomenon that does not phenomenalyze itself (...) non-manifestation" (114). This is a very valuable reading since he shows that the non-phenomenalizable in Celan's poetry doesn't have to do with the work's "own" elements but with the work as a place of encounter.

Along with selected works of Mandelstam, Buber and Heidegger, who are references for Celan, the texts that these three philosophers have written on Celan are the main secondary sources that inform my chapter. Given that neither of them takes into account Celan's dialogue with Mandelstam, this chapter is also informed by Michael Eskin's *Ethics and Dialogue in the Works of Levinas, Bakhtin, Mandel'stamm, and Celan* (2000);

Anna Glazova's doctoral dissertation *Counter-Quotation: The Defiance of Poetic Tradition in Paul Celan and Osip Mandelstam* (2008); and "Poetic Address and Intimate Reading: The Offered Hand" by William Waters (2014).

For a poet who related Nazi Germany to a moment in which language went through a "death bringing answerlessness," it is understandable that poetry would become a matter of address and reception. In the next two sections I will aim to show that Celan turns writing into a matter of reading rather than creating, in the name of human relations: "I, an eye / similar / to yours on each finger / probe for / a place, through which I / can wake myself toward you, / the bright / hunger candle in mouth (BIT 3)."⁴⁹ In these lines, which echo Whitman's and Mandelstam's references to fingertips and reading, it is not by chance that the speaker carries in his mouth a candle to read with instead of a tongue to speak with. I will now look at Celan's work in this light.

3.2. THE MERIDIAN

Delivered on 22 October 1960, *The Meridian* is considered Celan's "most important and extended statement on poetics" because this is where "the theoretical base of the changes from the early to the late work" ("Introduction," Joris xliii) is to be found. It has influenced writers, poets and artists from many parts of the world by not only reasserting the importance of addressing the other, but also of putting into question the language in which we do this as well as the conditions of possibility of address and reception. It is structured around four plays written by Georg Büchner.

The first part deals almost exclusively with the problem of art: "Ladies and Gentlemen! Art, you will remember, is a puppet-like, iambically five-footed and (...) childless being" (MDM 2). When Celan says: "you will remember," he appears to be referring to something like the death of art, but the speech actually shows that this isn't the case at all: art is absolutely present and we're too present in art. "Art, you will remember," is thus not an enunciation that refers to another time of art, a more sacred one, but to a discussion on art from *Danton's Death*.⁵⁰ In this conversation, Camille and

⁴⁹ "...ich, ein deinem/ gleichendes / Aug an jedem der Finger, / abtaste nach / einer Stelle, durch die ich / mich zu dir heranwachen kann, / die helle / Hungerkerze im Mund" (PC 207)

⁵⁰ "Camille: I tell you, if they don't get everything in wooden reproductions, in their theaters, concerts, art exhibitions, they won't even listen. But if they get a ridiculous marionette and they can see the strings moving it up and down they can see its legs creaking along in iambic pentameters, they say 'What truth!

Danton speak about the alienating function of art. The idea is that artistic representation leads outside of the human to the artificial and mechanical, where the estranged spectators “see and hear nothing.” Ultimately, what the conversation from *Danton’s Death* brings about is that art has a dangerous effect on the realm of existence that does not allow people to perceive mortality. This is the underlying way in which Celan lucidly speaks about four plays by Büchner, who also writes in *Danton’s Death*: “The audience applauds and we all love it! It’s all gesture, all acting, even if you do get really stabbed to death at the end” (35). The problem of art is thus that it estranges us and thwarts the awareness of mortality. In a letter to Klaus Reichert from 1967, Celan clarified that “his poems were not written for the dead but for the living, naturally, for those who know the dead exist” (MKR 93).⁵¹ This statement came after a few sentences in which he evoked *The Meridian* in order to explain that, in spite of what some might have repeatedly misinterpreted, it is definitively a speech against the artistic (318).

Accordingly, Celan presents Büchner’s characters in two different states: the human (when there is an awareness of mortality), and the automatons or marionettes. In “Majesties,” Derrida describes the duplicity as follows: “To think of a difference between the marionettes, to think *the* marionette, is to attempt to think of the living of life, and a living ‘being’ (un ‘etre’ vivant) that perhaps is not, a *living without Being* (un *vivant sans l’etre*: a living being without being (one))” (110). Generally, scholars agree on what this duplicity represents. Lacoue-Labarthe opposes the way of being of art to “the own-being; the ‘self’ or ‘I,’ or even the ‘he’ of singularity (...). The human, not man. And not the humanity of man. But the human as what allows there to be one man or another—

What understanding of the human nature, how profound! Take any tiny insight, any fatuous notion or tinpot aphorism, dress it up, and paint it in bright colors and parade it about for three acts ‘til it gets married or shoots itself and they cry ‘What idealism!’ If someone grinds out an opera which echoes the ebb and flow of human experience about as well as a clay pipe echoes a nightingale: ‘Such artistry!’ But turn them out of the theatre into the street and, oh dear, reality is just too sordid. They forget God himself, they prefer his imitators. Creation is being newly born every minute, within them and all around them, glowing, a storm glittering with lightning: but they hear and see nothing. They go to the theater, read poems and novels and praise the caricatures. To creation itself they say ‘How ugly, how boring’.

The Greeks warned us about literature with the story of Pygmalion’s statue, the stone came to life but unable to bear children.

Danton: And artists treat nature like David. When the massacred of September were thrown out of La Force Prison onto the street, he stood there cold-bloodedly drawing them. He said ‘I’m capturing the last twitches of life in these bastards’” (Büchner 40).

⁵¹ I haven’t found a translation in English of Celan’s prose fragments, notes and texts, that have been gathered together in the Spanish edition *Microlitos* (Editorial Trotta, 2015), translated by the critically acclaimed Spanish translator of Celan, José Luis Reina Palazón. For this reason, I have translated them from Spanish as I haven’t been able to find these short aphorisms in the original German material either. I only quote this material four times.

that man there, singular—in the here and now” (*Poetry as Experience* 47). Celan starts to develop this opposition in reference to “Leonce and Lena,” a play in which

time and lighting have become unrecognizable. For here we are “in a flight toward paradise,” “all watches and calendars” shall soon “be shattered,” even “forbidden”—though just before that “two persons of two sexes are presented,” “two world famous automaton have arrived,” and a man who says of himself that he “may be the third and strangest of them all” and insists “with a growling voice,” that we admire what’s before our eyes: “Nothing but art and mechanics, nothing but cardboard and watch springs!” (MDM 2)

There are two main reasons why time and lighting aren’t recognized here: first, artistic discourse benumbs the senses; second, the artistic way of being involves a flight toward paradise, an escape to the eternal, because being human means being aware of temporality and finitude. If time is forbidden, so is the awareness of mortality, which Celan, following Heidegger, also understands as a way in which the “I” can return from its uncanny existence: “a homecoming,” he writes. “Celan marked in his personal copy of *Sein und Zeit* [read between 1952-1953] several passages dealing with death *as the limit that enters the very structure of Dasein itself as its ownmost possibility*” (*Paul Celan and Martin Heidegger*, Lyon 156). This relationship is mentioned in *The Meridian* draft material: “The humans = the mortals. Therefore the poem, remaining mindful of death, counts among the most human side of man” (MDM 89). The uncanniness and lack of receptivity produced by art is a narrative, a myth, that gives people the illusion of being eternal even though at the end “they get stabbed in real life.” When he speaks about Büchner’s *Lenz*, Celan says: “[h]e who has art before his eyes and on his mind—I am with the Lenz narrative now—forgets himself. Art creates I-distance” (6).

It stands out that Celan constantly highlights the discursive nature of art. Wherever “I-distance” occurs in the plays, he stresses the presence of speech: “But you see it easily: Valerio’s ‘growling voice’ is unmistakable whenever art comes to the fore” (5). This is also the case with respect to the conversation between Camille and Danton and, again, in regard to Lenz’s self-forgetfulness: “Lenz spoke for a long time, ‘now all smiles, now serious.’ And then, when the conversation had run its course, it is said of him, thus of the one preoccupied with question about art, but at the same time also of the artist Lenz: ‘He had completely forgotten himself’” (6). Chatter is estranging: “[t]he *Unheimlich*,” writes Lacoue-Labarthe, “is, finally, forgetfulness: forgetting who speaks

when I speak, which clearly goes with forgetting to whom I speak when I speak, and who listens when I am spoken to” (*Poetry as Experience* 49). Therefore, “eloquence precedes dramatization and provides a reason for it: theater and theatricalized existence only *are* because there is discourse” (48). Poetry is thus a way of twisting or turning artistic discourse in order to interrupt it.

Heidegger’s work on authentic or primordial language and its appropriative effects on the human being who listens to language while speaking (to the nature of language, which withdraws as it speaks) is likely to be in the background of the connection that Celan eventually makes in his speech between language and finitude, which opens a possibility for the marionette to recover its “being.” The idea that language doesn’t have to be estranging, because it has a stillness which allows mortality to be heard and singularity to arise, is very important for Celan’s poetics. In the introduction to this chapter I mentioned that, like Nancy, Celan takes Heidegger’s being-towards-death beyond the self; this is also the way he develops Heidegger’s reflections on language.

For the philosopher, primordial language “gives itself (or gives a relation to itself in its nearness/withdrawal) in a suspension of speech that is indissociable from an experience of mortality” (Fynsk, “The Realities at Stake” 181). In “The Way to Language” Heidegger writes: “Owning and appropriation –abiding gift of saying.– Saying brings all present and absent beings each into their own, from what they are, and where they abide according to their kind” (127). Saying has an effect on singularity similar to the anticipatory resoluteness that brings authenticity to the inauthentic being. The reason for this is that Heidegger also stresses mortality here, because saying also implies retreat, silence, withdrawal:

The very *nature*, the *presencing*, of language *needs* and *uses* the speaking of mortals in order to sound as the peal of stillness for the hearing of mortals. Only as men belonging with the peal of stillness are mortals able to speak in their own way in sounds. Mortal speech is a calling that names... (“Language” 205)

Heidegger stresses that stillness, which is an originary, non-phenomenal condition of possibility of language, can only be heard because the speakers will eventually die, and it is precisely their relationship to death that simultaneously opens possibilities and reveals an impossible, unactualizable relation to nothingness. There is a correspondence between the nature of language and the authentic finite being which leads Celan to

define each poem as “a language fragment that has become mortal, that starts the route into nothingness...” (MDM 199).⁵² For Celan, as we will see later, this route is opened through poetic address.

However, Heidegger is not Celan’s sole interlocutor concerning the opposition between the automaton and the human and their connection to language. The poetic turn from one to the other, from the automaton to the human through the awareness of time is what Celan calls “a breathturn.” Whilst Heidegger doesn’t speak about breath, Mandelstam thinks about the concept of breath as an alternative to “a mechanist understanding of poetry” (Eskin 136). In Eskin’s detailed chapter, “Ossip Mandel’shtam and Paul Celan: The Poetics of Dialogue,” he explains that the Russian poet conceived of poetry “in chemical terms, as producing something completely new by bringing diverse materials to react to and with each other” (136). These diverse and multiple elements aren’t strictly chemicals:

In taking a breath the copier-translator poet inhales the words, voices, and intonations of others’ utterances, potentially separated by centuries, synthesizing and “chemically” transforming them; in exhaling the copier-translator-poet produces his or her own singular stylistic visage, translates his or her own singular position in co-existential dialogue. The poet’s “breathturn” (*Atemwende*)—to use Celan’s neologism—the transition from inhalation to exhalation is indispensable for the production of poetry. With every breath the poet takes, he remembers; with every act of exhalation he or she produces. (139)

This stands very close to Celan’s critique of the mechanical, because the main problem is not solely the estrangement from oneself, but the idea that something can be made in isolation and from nothing, silence. The breathturn is thus not a return to the self, but an opening to a different kind of strangeness that excinds the self with plurality. As I stated earlier, my aim is to argue that *The Meridian* proposes an unworking poetics in which writing is a way of listening, and of listening to time rather than meaning. Eskin’s

⁵² In *Sounding/Silence: Martin Heidegger at the Limits of Poetics*, David Nowell Smith explains that for Heidegger “the determination of verbal language takes place not merely as semantic clarity but as a bringing-to-voice,” linking “the phonetic’ explanation of verbal sound as a sensuous token with the ‘physiological’ explanation of sound through the vocal cords. (...) [t]his ‘bringing-to-voice’ is concerned with the movement of language of two different peals of stillness: the silence of a ‘linguistic essence’ beyond all human activity, and therefore beyond the limits of the audible, and a silence that stems out of the opacity of the human body itself” (89).

presentation of Mandelstam's poet as a copier-translator points in that direction.⁵³ What is problematic about "art's machinations" is that they do not entail the breath or intake of other time-bound utterances. Artistic discourse is non-perceptive and non-responsive. And the completed product, the artifact, stops breathing. For Celan there is no complete poem, poems keep breathing in and out: each one "stands fast on the edge of itself; it calls and brings itself in order to be able to exist ceaselessly back from its already-no-longer into its always-still" (*MDM* 8). In a well-known letter to Hans Bender from May 1960 he writes:

Don't come to me with *poiein* and the like, I suspect that this word, with all its nearness and distance, means something quite different from its current context. True, there are exercises – in the *spiritual* sense, dear Hans Bender. And then there are, at every lyrical street corner, experiments that muck around with the so-called word-material. (...) "How are poems made?" Some years ago, I had the occasion to witness, and later, to watch from a certain distance how "making" turns by and by into "making it" and then into machinations. (*Collected Prose* 26)

One of *The Meridian* draft notes stresses that the problem with these machinations has to do with answerability: "art is artificial, synthetic, manufactured: it is the grating sound of the automaton that is alien to humans and creatures: here it is already cybernetics, a marionette programmed to respond" (Celan in Lyon, *Paul Celan and Martin Heidegger*, 125). A programmed response is as dangerous as the *death bringing answerlessness* that, for Celan, language underwent under Nazism. In contrast to artistic discourse, which is non-responsive and fabricates unitary and finished machinations, poetic language is incomplete and open (responsive).

Celan refers to the end of *Danton's Death* to show how poetry answers to the realm of art by suspending its discourse through an unworking experience of language. He recalls the part of the play that represents the result of art's machinations, when the artistic characters are going to be executed:

What had inserted itself during the conversation cuts through ruthlessly and reaches the Revolution Square (...) The passengers are there, all of them, Danton, Camille, the others. Here too they have words, many artful words, and they make them stick, there is much talk—and here Büchner only needs to quote—talk of going-together-into-death,

⁵³ Nevertheless, Eskin's dialogism restricts his interpretation, which sometimes describes Celan's translations of Mandelstam as hermeneutic spaces of renovation and cocreation.

Fabre even maintains that he can die doubly—only a few voices, a “few”—nameless “voices,” find that “all of this is old hat and boring.” (*MDM* 3)

Danton and Camille’s conversation about art is referred to in the first sentence, which is said to be ruthlessly present, since the violence of artistic discourse takes shape in the executions: absolute “death bringing answerlessness.” The next sentences show different ways in which art is present here. First through the “many artful words” with which each of these men arrive at their death scene, which none of them can properly (literally, from their ownmost self) understand; we know this because it is said they believe they can “die together”—which means they aren’t aware that death is their ownmost possibility—or even “doubly,” as Celan ridicules Fabre’s “heroic” and spectacular misapprehension of finitude. It is also worth noticing that art isn’t only in the mouths of the condemned: the audience is estranged as well, they’re only there for a spectacle that they happen to find boring that day—they are also benumbed by art and don’t perceive life and death. The scene builds up so that we can finally understand why Camille’s death is considered “theatrical” until it turns into *his* death “two scenes later through a word foreign—yet so near to him...” (3):

[W]hen all around Camille pathos and sententiousness confirm the triumph of the “puppet” and the “string,” then Lucile, one who is blind to art, the same Lucile for whom language is something person-like and tangible, is there, once again, with her sudden “Long live the king!” After all the words spoken on the rostrum (the scaffold, that is)—what a word! It is the counterword; it is the word that cuts the “string,” the word that no longer bows down before “the bystanders and old-war horses of history.” It is an act of freedom. It is a step. (3)

Celan calls Lucile’s cry a “counterword” that “cuts the string.” In one of the drafts of this passage he wrote “shattering” (20), instead of the adverb “sudden” to describe it; this word variant accurately addresses the fact that the expression “Long live the king!” breaks the “rostrum” on which the Reign of Terror was set. It cuts the puppets’ “string” so that they no longer bow down to those who control them, or rather to the narrative which does, because it is none other than the string used by artistic discourse “to string together word upon word” (2).

In chapter one, I explained that Nancy thinks immanent communities are founded on myths that are produced and reproduced through narrations. Grounded on myth, a community aims to draw everyone into the narrative it promotes. Therefore,

communities operate under the principle of the same and absorb or eliminate difference. In the case of the French Revolution, the myth is an anti-monarchic one that promotes liberty, equality and freedom, but the process of producing the essence of the community still follows the logic of myth and therefore has a violent outcome that Büchner describes in the words of Danton: “I see a great disaster overwhelming France. It is a dictatorship, it has torn off its veil (...) it tramples over corpses (...). There are assassins, the ravens of the Committee of Public Safety. I accuse Robespierre, St Just and their executioners of high treason” (Büchner 67). Danton accuses his friends of abandoning the principles they were fighting for, but in truth it’s Danton and Camille who are betraying the mythic will to power of their community. Hence, for Celan there is a political dimension of artistic discourse that Nancy’s reflections on myth help us to see.

Celan constantly stresses the importance of asking these questions *today*. He mentions this at least twice: “That I worry about these with such stubbornness today probably is in the air—the air we have to breathe today” (*MDM* 5), and “—oh art! I am stuck, you see, on this word of Camille’s. I am aware that one can (...) give it different accents: the acute of today, the grave of history—literary history too, the circumflex—a sign of expansion—of the eternal. I give it—I have no other choice—I give it the acute” (4). In this second passage, the difference between the grave of history—literary history too— and the acute accent of today is key to decide what to privilege when approaching the question of art in *The Meridian*. By choosing the present over literary history we have to understand that he is addressing the question of the value and possibilities of writing after the rise and fall of the Nazi myth (which Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy have written about in “The Nazi Myth,” published in 1990).

Celan is thus reading Büchner from his own present and that is the angle from which he tries to understand Lucile’s cry, which is not literal: “Of course, one hears it (...) first of all as a declaration of loyalty to the ‘ancien régime.’ But here (...) no monarchy and no to be conserved yesterdays are being paid homage to;” homage, Celan continues, is paid to “the majesty of the absurd as witness for the presence of the human” (3).⁵⁴ The presentation of the human is related to an interruption of discourse

⁵⁴ Glazova reflects on Lucile’s “*Vive le roi*” as the automatic repetition of a royalist motto: “Her ‘counterword’ is not of her own invention and she speaks, as it were, beside herself, in self-forgetfulness. ‘Vive le roi’ is not so much spoken by Lucile—or Büchner—as by the historical event and by the dramatic representation of the revolution. Paradoxically, in Celan’s description, the movement against ‘die Kunst’ comes from the midst of ‘die Kunst’ itself: Lucile – who cries out her counterword entirely ‘automatically’

(mythic discourse) that puts language in contact with finitude. An alternative form of communication opens up that acknowledges what went unrecognized in artistic discourse (since it benumbs the senses, thwarts perception and causes people to forget themselves to the extent of believing they can die “doubly”). Therefore, the counterword is the language that brings temporality to the fore. “In the counter-word,” writes Lacoue-Labarthe, “(...) the possibility of death ‘resolutely’ opens up, as does something like what Heidegger calls, with respect to Dasein, its ‘ownmost possibility.’ And from that point on exist –these are Celan’s words–‘fate’ and ‘direction’” (*Poetry as Experience* 51). This is why Celan assures us that after Lucile’s intervention Camille’s death can finally turn into his own and why her cry doesn’t pay homage to monarchy. But how, then, can we explain the relationship between majesty and the absurd that Celan points out?

Lacoue-Labarthe associates Lucile’s cry with the majesty of the absurd on the basis of the relationship between language and mortality; specifically with Lucile’s own death, because the cry leads to her arrest. He argues that the counterword is absurd because it is a suicidal decision to die (50). Fynsk, who doesn’t allude directly to the concept of the absurd, interprets the cry as an act of freedom “that draws its force from its mortal character in as much as with this ‘counterword’ [she] commits herself to death” (“The Realities at Stake” 167). From these two perspectives, the counterword interrupts the “flight toward paradise” with which so many of Büchner’s characters attempt to flee mortality. Fynsk and Lacoue-Labarthe are right in pointing out the strong relationship between death and language here. However, if the absurd had to do with the suicidal aspect of Lucile’s cry, counterwords would be sacrificial, drawing us into the mythic. Instead, I stand closer to how Derrida reads this sentence and agree that Celan stresses the absurd in relation to “what remains beyond meaning, beyond ideas, beyond theme and even rhetorical tropes” (“Majesties” 117).⁵⁵ Death remains beyond all these things, but not only Lucile’s, for this cry is what ultimately gives Camille his proper death.

– breaks the automatism of the rules of drama” (10). Glazova’s dissertation comparatively explores the notions of conversation and quotation in Celan and Mandelstam, as ways in which their poetics are open to otherness: “Quotation is a pore which allows the passage of the other into the text, without, however, absorbing the other’s difference” (71). Müller-Sievers also addresses this issue, especially in regard to the emphasis Celan puts on Büchner’s own quoting practice, in “On the Way to Quotation: Paul Celan’s ‘Meridian’ Speech” (2004).

⁵⁵ “What is perceived and is to be perceived once and always again once, and only here and now. Hence the poem would be the place where all tropes and metaphors want to be carried ad absurdum” (*MDM* 10).

“Long live the king!” suspends the reigning logic and narrative that founds the realm of art. In this sense the “majesty of the absurd” is a claim to sovereignty of a counter-narrative, of another way of speaking that is voice and voiceless at the same time (as Celan writes in two different notes).⁵⁶ This type of language opens relations that take into account singularity and difference; but beyond meaning, in the exposure of finitude. With the figure of Lucile, reception and address finally come to the fore because, before, in the realm of art, the problem was precisely the lack of perception and receptivity.

The way Celan articulates Büchner’s Lucile and makes her the representative of poetry is congruent with her role throughout the play: she is represented as a person who is “blind to art.” Paradoxically, this condition allows her to see and listen. Just before Celan’s speech takes us to the Revolution Square, he introduces her “as the same Lucile for whom language is something person-like and tangible” (*MDM* 3). He portrays her like this due to the part she plays in the scene in which Danton and Camille have the conversation on art that *The Meridian* returns to. After Danton speaks about David’s paintings, he is called outside and Camille and Lucile speak briefly in his absence:

Camille. What do you say, Lucile?

Lucile. I just love to watch you talk.

Camille. But do you hear what I say?

Lucile. Of course.

Camille. But am I right? Did you really hear what I said?

Lucile. Well, no. Not really. (Büchner 40)

Celan references this part of the conversation indirectly: “but whenever there is talk about art, there is also always someone who is present who... doesn’t really listen” (*MDM* 3). Nevertheless, he corrects himself and says that in fact that person does hear, listen and look, but doesn’t pay attention to the conversation; she pays attention to the speaker. Someone is present “who ‘sees him speak,’ who perceives language and shape, and also –who could doubt this here in writing of this order?—breath, that is, direction and destiny” (3). Lucile actually sees Camille as a human, not a marionette. His

⁵⁶ First reference: “For Osip Mandelstam, born in 1891 (...) the poem is the place where what can be reached through language (by the individual) (...) enters into an indissoluble connection with (...) his (the individual’s) speechlessness (...) <?> meets the question after the whereto and wherefrom of the one who speaks, voiced /stimmbegabt/ and voiceless at the same time.. ” (*MDM* 147). Second reference, letter to Herman Kasack: “Aren’t poems exactly this? The infinite-saying of mortality and nothingness that remains mindful of its finitude. (Please excuse the emphasis: it belongs to the dust that sets free and receives us and our voiceful-voiceless souls)” (202).

singularity becomes “tangible” in the rhythm and tone of his speech, in its silences, in the turn of breath between inhalation and exhalation during the conversation. Her perception bears witness to the phenomenal character of poetry. Any reflection on Lucile’s “Long live the king!” must take this other moment into consideration because it allows us to understand that reception *speaks*: it sounds like a senseless cry that connects through finitude—Camille’s destiny to Lucile’s. The simultaneity of address and reception, their combination and overlap, is the unfolding paradox of Celan’s poetics and *The Meridian*.

For the moment, I’ve presented and developed core issues from the speech that help us understand where Celan’s call to relate address and reception to finitude comes from. I’ve presented the interruptive relationship between art and poetry, which scholars generally identify as *The Meridian*’s “plot” (Glazova 25), insisting particularly on the artistic as a non-responsive discourse that is lifeless, estranged and impersonal. We saw that the Heideggerian relationship between language, mortality and being theoretically backs up the role poetry plays as a response to art in this speech. But Celan moves beyond Heidegger with the figure of Lucile, who starts to show that address and reception overlap as they expose existential correspondences, what Celan calls “the presence of human,” which can only be understood in relation. Her cry unworks an estranging discourse by becoming a passage of multiple utterances (her line is a quotation and a response which reshapes Camille’s destiny and determines her own) that don’t *mean* anything.

In the next section, I will argue that Celan makes address and reception overlap at the limits of the subject, self-presence and meaning. At the same time, we will see that the ideas exposed in *The Meridian* are not only taken from his reading of Büchner, but also Mandelstam; consequently, he erases the boundaries between the reflections of a reader and an author, between a recipient and a creator. The author is presented as being as good a listener as the reader. But the issue is not that the reader becomes a maker too, it is not that they “reciprocally constitute one another,” but rather that they are both equally vulnerable or equally open to “deconstitute one another in the chiasmus” (Hamacher 247) caused by the temporality that poetic address exposes. I will also present Celan’s proximity with Martin Buber’s *I and Thou*, even though his poetics challenges dialogic symmetry, intersubjectivity and, in the case of mystic dialogism, spirituality.

3.3. THE BLACK EARTH

In the “Editor’s Preface” of *The Meridian Final Version—Drafts—Materials* edition, it is said that the speech Celan gave in 1958 on presenting the Literary Prize of the Free Hanseatic City of Bremen is probably the first of his texts to anticipate *The Meridian*. The claim is supported with the following quote: “Poems are also on the way in this manner: they are headed for something. Toward what? Toward something still open, still to be occupied, perhaps toward a responsive You” (xiv). The editors chose this quotation for two reasons: it focuses on the question of address and it is in direct dialogue with Osip Mandelstam, because this sentence comes right after Celan compares a poem to a message in a bottle: “A poem, as a manifestation of language and thus essentially dialogue, can be a message in a bottle, sent out in the—not always hopeful—belief that somewhere and sometime it could wash up on land, on heartland perhaps” (*SPP* 396). In his 1913 essay, “On the Addressee,” Mandelstam wrote:

At a critical moment a seafarer tosses a sealed bottle into the ocean waves, containing his name and a message detailing his fate. Wandering along the dunes many years later, I happen upon it in the sand. I read the message, note the date, the last will and testament of one who has passed on. I have the right to do so. I have not opened someone else’s mail. The message in the bottle was addressed to its finder. I found it. That means I have become its secret addressee. (68)

Celan’s allusion to this passage has received attention by every scholar who studies their relationship. Glazova uses it to compare that which I too am concerned with: their different views on address and time. “The temporality of Mandelstam’s poem is (...) defined both in relation to the past and to the future. This structure perpetuates a poetic tradition which, by means of transformation, continues a ‘dialogue’ with authors long dead and addresses authors to come” (6). She interprets the destinatory as an author and the temporality involved as time travel. William Waters argues that the reference to the date in Mandelstam’s passage is an affirmation that “the writer is dead” and that “[o]nce you have found the message, there will be no other addressee. In this way you become answerable for it” (104-105). His aim is to relate address, reception and ethics.

I believe Mandelstam’s passage points to the main issues of *The Meridian*: address, destiny and encounter. And it refers to time in two different ways: there is the vast time that comes between the critical moment in which the seafarer tosses the bottle and when it is found, and then there is the other time, more intimate, when the finder reads the

message. According to Mandelstam, the anonymity of the addressee is guaranteed by the first kind of time: the distance between the seafarer and the person who finds the bottle. But the second time also involves distance: “I read the message, *note the date, the last will and testament of one who has passed on.*” An existential distance opens up as address, encounter and finitude are interwoven. Celan develops this reflection in *The Meridian* by relating “the darkness of poetry” to the structure of dates.

The reflection arises when he discusses Lenz’s “homecoming;” this is, when he turns toward the “human:” “I am taking leave of the man who forgot himself, the man preoccupied by art, the artist (...) I search for Lenz himself, I search for him—as a person, I search for his shape: for the sake of the place of poetry, for the setting free, for the step” (MDM 6). He finds him in two different moments of the novella. The first is when Lenz is described as one who “on the 20th January walked through the mountains” (7). Celan shows that this Lenz can be understood as an “I” because he is time-bound by a date. The second moment of “Lenz” that he considers poetic, Lenz’s “Long live the king,” as he describes it, speaks of a date that “cannot be read off calendars and horologes” (57). This is the passage in which, according to Celan, Lenz is “set free” as a person: “...except sometimes it annoyed him that he could not walk on his head.’ (...) Ladies and gentlemen—he who walks on his head” —writes Celan— “has the sky beneath him as an abyss” (6).

This abyss has, in part, the same function as the majesty of the absurd of Lucile’s cry: it signals the realm of poetry and starts to characterize its resistance to certain forms of discourse and meaning. It brings to light the fathomless character of poetic language. And also of the date. If we look at the drafts of this part of the speech, the relationship between the date and the abyss is stated from the very beginning. Twice in the drafts Celan drew a little arrow underneath the word “abyss” in Büchner’s quotation, with the arrow head pointing to these words: “To wr.<ite> under such dates” (57). This relationship is significant because it ties the act of writing to dating and to darkness, the coming forth of temporality to the withdrawal of meaning and presence.

Derrida explores Celan’s reflection on dates extensively in his well-known essay “Shibboleth for Paul Celan,” where he writes that “the date represents the eradication of the hermeneutic principle, because as long as there is a date there is no longer a sole originary meaning” (26). A date opens something that is common to the abyss of singularity and otherness (to what is not common). Dates are what make singularities

recognizable and other at the same time: Lenz and Celan have a 20th of January in common, but neither can fully grasp the 20th of January of the other. As many Celan scholars recall, on that same day in the year 1942 the Wannsee Conference took place, which is why later on in the speech Celan admits that there were a couple of times in which he wrote himself from his own 20th of January. In fact, Celan goes on to ask if “[p]erhaps one can say that each poem has its own ‘20th of January’ inscribed in it?” (MDM 8) With this question he characterizes poems, structurally, as dates and date-making. For this reason Derrida writes that “It makes no sense (...) to dissociate, on the one hand, Celan’s writings *on the subject* of the date, those that name the theme of the date, from, on the other hand, the poetic traces of dating” (“Shibboleth” 4).

Celan developed this idea from his mid-period works on. It is the theme of the following poem from *Schneepart*, written in the late 60’s:

Unreadability of this
world. Everything doubles.

The strong clocks
agree with the fissure-hour,
hoarsely.

You, wedged into your deepest,
climb out of yourself
forever.

(BIT 196)⁵⁷

The poem introduces the date-making abyss by saying that the world is both unreadable (abyssal, majestically absurd) and double. The movement of the date described by Derrida and by Celan when the latter recalls the 20th of January is precisely a doubling of the date. In other words, unreadability marks each date from the start because each date is also always a date for the other. This is referred to in the second stanza through the image of the fissure-hour, the hour of the doubling split. It opens the poem to singularity and otherness, which is why the hour is fissured; and the notion of singularity is reinforced with the adjective hoarsely. Celan’s references to the voice relate to singularity, because that’s precisely where one hears the finite stillness; voices are never

⁵⁷ “Unlesbarkeit dieser / Welt. Alles doppelt. // Die starken Uhren / geben der Spaltstunde recht, heiser. // Du, in dein Tiefstes geklemmt, entsteigst dir / für immer” (PC 355).

completely present or sonorous but also withdrawing and voiceless.⁵⁸ The gravity of being hoarse alludes precisely to that singular and finite stillness. The last three lines address the person who is making this doubling of time possible, who is making the poem unreadable by reading it and who, by taking a stand in this sharing, undergoes a certain kind of erasure too, for the addressee's date is also split by the proximity of the other's, hence the hoarse voice, and the climbing out of oneself.

In a complex essay on Celan, Hamacher writes that

A ripening and temporalizing function arrives to language even before its referential function. What Kant said of time is no less valid for temporal language in Celan: it is the formal condition *a priori* of representation in general. In this way, Celan's poems speak (...) of the condition of their own possibility. They do not name something determinate but bring the very determinate ground of speaking into language. (231)

From this point of view, time precedes and makes possible the possibility of speaking, and its referential and representational functions. If we take this into consideration we can look back on Lucile's cry and say that the referential function is unworked, rendered absurd and pushed to its limit in order for time to stand out in a mode of withdrawal, because in this scene "the poem (...) literally speaks itself to death" (Celan, *MDM* 102). If we relate Hamacher's note to the previous poem, we understand why temporality is actually the condition of impossibility of the referential and representational function of language, because it is on account of time, or, more precisely, time difference, that the poems become unreadable. This is, in fact, Hamacher's conclusion: for Celan, poetry "can assert the condition of its possibility only as the condition of impossibility of its stable semantic subsistence" (232). This might help us interpret a mysterious note from 1968: "something that is also called semantics is an enemy of meanings" (Celan, *MKR* 42). This note addresses the movements of withdrawal that Celan's poems are open to. And it also stresses singularity; a *Meridian* note from 1960 says that the poem "is, also in terms of its semantic meaning, the place of the singular, the irreversible, it says, to say it differently, the cemetery of all synonymics" (118). The combination of these fragmentary notes provides us with more clarity on what it is about semantics –and time– that is an

⁵⁸ "...the one who speaks, voiced /stimmbegabt/ and voiceless at the same time..." (*MDM* 147). I will develop the question of the voice in chapter four when I relate Celan to Nancy, for now I want to suggest that Celan's way of understanding the duplicity of the sounding voice might be indebted to Heidegger. Nowell Smith argues that "Heidegger sees the voice specifically as an engagement with an opacity within the human body. Not only would this opacity resist self-presence, but would generate presence only by exacting a radical openness to the absencing movement which bounds it" (184).

enemy of meanings, and a challenge to linguistics: the fact that the singularity of each poem relies on the stillness of finitude.

Once we start to take into account the complexity of the date—its darkness and unreadability, or, in other words, how in the way it opens up each time it also loses something—we get close to a poetics that definitively demarcates a literary site for the unworking and the question of unworking relations: relationality and the acknowledgment of the other are of utmost importance here. Ultimately, this is why Celan says that Lenz goes a step further than Lucile:

His “Long live the king” is no longer a word, it is a terrifying falling silent, it takes away his—and our—breath and words. Poetry: this can be an *Atemwende* (...) perhaps it is exactly here that the automatons break down—for this single short moment? Perhaps here, with the I—with the estranged I set free *here* and *in this manner*—perhaps a further Other is set free? (*MDM* 7)

This is the first line in which the other is mentioned. Lenz’s “Long live the king” is a falling silent, but this also means that it gains *direction* and speaks —within the majesty of the absurd—to an other. In fact, the rest of the speech, as well as Celan’s poetry from around that period, address the last two questions that he asks in relation to the “20th of January” and which have to do with what opens up at this point: “don’t [we] all write ourselves from such dates? And toward what date do we write ourselves” (8)?

In a conversation with Hugo Hoppert from 1966, Celan said:

I stand on a level of time and space different from that of my reader, he can only understand me “at a distance;” he cannot quite lay hold of me, since he is forced always to grasp the bars which separate us. (...) But this look exchanged through bars, this “distanced understanding” is in itself conciliatory, is in itself gain, consolation, and perhaps hope. (Meyerhofer 83)

The conversation recalls the title of Celan’s 1959 poetry collection, *Sprachgitter*, in which he began to develop the reflections on language that would mark the rest of his work. This is when his poetry definitively started to become “a matter of the most essential: (...) a matter of direction” (*MDM* 63). The expression “distanced understanding” accurately describes the question of readability for Celan. It points to how each poem is a conversation that has always already fallen silent; a “desperate dialogue,” he announces in *The Meridian*. The last lines of a late poem draw a picture of how these boundaries are

read: “arrowy one, when you whirl toward me, / I know from where / I forget from where” (*BIT* 435). But this forgetfulness doesn’t point to a strangeness like the uncanniness of art; it points to the impossibility of appropriating the other, of reducing the other to the same: “The strange remains strange, it does not ‘correspond’ (and respond) *completely*, it retains its opacity (which lends it relief and appearance (phenomenality))” (*MDM* 71). In this parenthesis something new comes up: non-correspondence *lends* the strange relief and phenomenality. Hence, what we perceive of others is withdrawal, but this movement opens the other to singularity: “relief” (a “moulding, carving, stamping, etc., in which the design stands out from a plane surface so as to have a natural and solid appearance” (OED)) and phenomenality (the sound of a withdrawing voice).

In the following passage we see how he relates the date-making abyss to the appearance of “the strange” in the Mandelstam radio-essay:

The question about the wherefrom becomes more urgent [in his last book of poetry: The Voronezh Notebooks], more desperate —the poetry—in one of his essays he calls it a plough—tears open the abyssal strata of time, the “black earth of time” appears on the surface. The eye, talking with the perceived, and pained, develops a new ability: it becomes visionary: it accompanies the poem into its underground. The poem writes itself toward an *other*, a “strangest” time. (*MDM* 219)

This passage, partly transcribed in *The Meridian*, condenses the main problems of Celan’s poetics and specifically the relationship between time and the other. It begins with the question of the “where-from” and ends with the assertion of the “where-to” (toward an *other*). In both cases time appears on the surface. Nevertheless, it is not entirely accessible, which is why it requires ploughing the black earth. In regard to Celan’s dates Derrida wrote: “let us not believe that what becomes readable would be the date *itself*; rather, it is only the poetic experience of the date, that which a date, *this one*, ordains in our relation to it, a certain poetic seeking” (“Shibboleth” 6). This poetic quest fits the description of the work done with the plough that Celan, as a reader of Mandelstam’s poems, does in that essay. His is the eye that accompanies each poem into the underground to plough the earth until time is torn open and becomes perceivable—in the tearing itself, not fully, for only “an ear, severed, listens / an eye, cut in strips / does justice to all this” (*BIT* 9).

And his is also the eye that has been “pained” by the singularity of Mandelstam’s “where-from.” In another part of the radio-essay Celan clarifies what he means with this reference to pain: “It is this tension of the times, between its own and the foreign, which lends that pained-mute vibrato to a Mandelstam poem by which we recognize it” (*MDM* 216). According to this, pain and singularity are related, and the voicelessness of what is said is tied to pain, which is why it is a pained-mute-vibrato. The reader can only perceive it as a limit. Pain is therefore what the addressee crashes against if she reads in the hope of recognition or appropriation. Let’s look at a late poem by Celan in which such a “mute vibrato” is encountered:

The to-be-restuttered world,
 whose guest I
 will have been, a name,
 sweated down the wall,
 up which a wound licks. (BIT 335)⁵⁹

In the first line we become aware of the possibility of “re-stuttering” the world. Stuttering instead of speaking is very descriptive of Celan’s poetics and of the “pained-mute-vibrato.” I mentioned an earlier stutter, from *Die Niemandrose*, where Celan recovers Hölderlin’s “pallaksch.” I said then that stuttering was a response to a frustrating experience of reception that made Celan seek another language for his wounds. Here we are in a very similar place. There is no difference between the stutter and the licks against the wall. They are manifestations of the illegible: a wall is built on the pained-mute wound that makes the poem unreadable, incomplete and re-stutterable. The openness stressed by the “re” or “*Nachzu*” gives the poem a messianic dimension of what is always still to come.

This idea is reinforced by the use of the future perfect of the guest who the speaker “will have been,” one of those times. This time structure helps Celan set the speaker up as an addressee and to speak from the perspective of reception. While the poem arrives, the speaker waits for a poem that *will have* addressed and named her in the time lapse during which she *will have been* its guest. Leonard Olschner has noted “that Celan’s ‘you-saying’ could be viewed as response in general: Celan considers and experiences himself as literally addressed in such a way that he responds by saying

⁵⁹ “Die Nachzustotternde Welt, / bei der ich zu Gast / gewesen sein werde, ein Name, / herabgeschwitzt von der Mauer, / an der eine Wunde hochleckt” (*PC* 361).

‘you’—as if he had to hold on to the interpellating and in turn interpellated agent” (Olschner in Eskin 188). If we keep this in mind while reading this poem, we can conclude that the author is writing from the author-reader position in which writing is listening and *trying* to respond. Accordingly, this poem involves another way of thinking about authorship: it’s not that the author is erased from the poem, but that the author is in the same position as the reader. Therefore, the wall doesn’t necessarily stand in the place of the writer’s pain; rather, it is a shared barrier that both subjects crash against and withdraw from. If we return to the vocabulary of the former poem, we could say that the poem itself is a “fissure-hour.”

The poem has no ownership and is nonetheless personal. Even though Celan steps away from monological poetry, he does believe it is “one person’s language become shape” (*MDM* 9), like Camille when observed by Lucile. So even if each poem “is lonely and *en route*. The author remains added to it” (9), and this addition is part of what creates the “tension of the times” that takes place between the “where-from” and the “where-to,” in the sense that the poem writes itself toward another. And that “strangest”⁶⁰ time toward which the poem writes itself is the time of the eye that accompanies the poem into its underground as the poem loses something in *turning* into a date for the other.⁶¹ This breathturn bears the Mandelstam stamp.

In a note, Celan wrote: “Mandelst: he knew that in the poem time - close means time -open” (sic 203). One’s time can only appear in the face of somebody else’s, in the encounter, which is what Celan means when he says that: “[e]very strange time is other than ours; we are far outside, but in any case only at the edge of our own time” (36). A poem from *Atemwende* helps clarify this:

Slate-eyed one, reached
by the striding counterscript the

⁶⁰ In the speech Celan starts off by speaking about this “strangest” time in the same way as he does in the Mandelstam essay. In one part he says: “perhaps there are two strangenesses—close together, in one and the same direction” (*MDM* 7). Here he is comparing the “I-distance” produced by art to the breathturn of poetry, to a language that is both person-like and inclined to ash. However, precisely because of this and maybe because he also senses the ethical risks of calling the other and the time of the other the strange, he later takes a distance from that formulation: “I think that it has always been part of the poem’s hopes to speak on behalf of exactly this *strange*—no, I cannot use this word in this way—exactly on *another’s behalf*—who knows, perhaps on behalf of a *totally other*” (8).

⁶¹ The centrality that Celan gives to personal pain and dates makes me skeptical of the post-modern readings of Celan which conclude that in “the poem nothingness encounters; nothingness speaks” (Hamacher 241). The very idea of time is supposed to help give these personal wounds and dates phenomenality, appearance, even though appearance relies on irrepresentability and otherness; even though the “I” and “you” are never fully themselves or present.

day after the blinding.

Readable bloodclot-messenger,
hither-died, despite all,
carried by knowing barbed-wire wings
over the undisplaceable
thousand-wall.

You here, you: quickened
by the breath of the
names
caught in free-
shoveled lungbranches.

To-
be-deciphered you.

With you,
on the vocalcords' bridge, in the
great Inbetween,
nightover.

Shot at with hearttones,
from all the world-pulpits. (BIT 97-99)⁶²

This is a metapoem about the movement and tension of the “where-from” and “where-to”—all within the majesty of the absurd: in the *counterscript* of neologisms and a broken syntax. It starts with an interpellation to “the slate-eyed one,” a designation that probably refers to the perceptive being standing at “the edge” of her own time, whose eye is the slate on which the poem is to be read and written and to whom it is directed. It also refers to the singularity of the recipient, because for Celan “stones” are metaphors of a singular existence, and a slate is a rock-formation that can easily be split into flat plates

⁶² “Schieferäugige, von / der schreitenden Gegenschrift am / Tag nach der Blendung erreicht. // Lesbare Blutklumpen-Botin, / herübergestorben, trotz allem, / von wissenden Stacheldrahtschwingen / über die unverrückbare / Tausendmauer getragen. // Du hier, du: verlebendigt / vom Hauch der im frei- / geschaufelten Lungengeäst / hängengebliebenen / Namen. // Zu / Entziffernde du. // Mit dir, auf der Stimmbänderbrücke, im / Großen Dazwischen, / nachtüber. // Mit Herztönen beschossen, / von allen Weltkanzeln her” (PC 251-252).

(the fissure-hour). The third line announces a date: the day after the blinding. This hermeneutic barrier could be a recourse to interrupt any meaning that was being created by the poem, or a reference to the blindness Celan spoke of in relation to Lucile, who is blind to art; or maybe it's referring to an addressee whose eyes have turned from blindness back into slates, that have returned from the artistic to the human. I think the first option is more likely since the next lines speak of the "clotting" of the message.

The next stanza opens the question of readability: the poem as a "bloodclot messenger" that does not cover the reader in the blood of who wrote it, because the counterscript turns words into platelets that stop the leakage. In the next line this clotting is related to a language that is aware "that the dead exist." It starts opening the poem's "route into nothingness." A route that can only and simultaneously affirm what is most singular: pain. The three lines that follow transform the image of the bird messenger —songs of birds are usually associated to lyricism—into a post-war, post concentration camp bird made out of barbed wire. This image reinforces the datability of the wound. There we run into a limit, an unmovable thousand-wall. Maybe thousands of people stand behind it, like prisoners. Maybe it holds the memory of a millenary community, maybe the wall itself is thousands of years old. Whatever it is, it's not ours to climb over. As readers we can only stand against it and catch our breath in its shadow.

Scholars who acknowledge an ethical side in Celan's poetics have analyzed the next two stanzas. Nowell Smith uses the poem's reference to the in-between of the vocal cords to support the idea that there was an ethical potential in Heidegger's "problematic of a bodily relationality of language" which Celan developed:

The figure merges the physicality and the relationality of the address that binds speaker and addressee: the addressee comes to be situated within the speaker's throat and in the same gesture the throat itself ceases to be "proper" and starts to inhabit, and co-habit, this "between." (186)⁶³

⁶³ Nowell Smith introduces the poem in the context of a larger reflection on Heidegger and sound that relates (albeit not analogically) the relationship between sound and stillness, as developed in his reflections on language, to the movement of earth and world in *The Origin of the Work of Art*. Celan comes up at the end because he "can be seen to reframe the relationship between human speech and the originary saying of language as an ethical relation, between I and thou" and shows that "there is another aspect of Heidegger's thinking that has points of contact with an ethics of poetry" (186). Ziarek reads the poem with a similar intention: he is concerned with showing that the "Celanian ethical concern can be seen (...) as an inflection of language whose mechanism cannot be known or described because the sense it generates does not belong within the cognitive or semantic fields. It marks itself in language only indirectly by inflecting and directing it toward the other; that is, it can be discerned only to the extent that one

I agree with this interpretation. By referring to the vocal cords instead of the words, Celan is making a very important point: that the strange “co-habits” being primordially, in the vocal-cords, even before the words are pronounced. If the voice is an expression of singularity, the poem suggests that singularity itself is plural, it is “the great Inbetween.” In fact, this is precisely why reading Celan’s poetry leads to an experience at the limits of the “self” that converses with what Nancy calls a literary community, which is what I will develop in the next chapter.

Kristof Ziarek, in *Inflicted Language: Towards a Hermeneutics of Nearness*, accurately points out that the “you” is enlivened by the breath of the name, but doesn’t reflect on the relationship between “breathing” and the act of “shoveling the lungbranches” in the poem. The poem’s reference to shoveling might first recall Celan’s “Death Fugue,” which describes the work done by the prisoners who shoveled “a grave in the air, who shoveled a grave in the ground.” Nevertheless, due to its vicinity in the poem to breath and naming, here the action seems closer to life than death. My interpretation is that the verb is actually referring to the action of shoveling and ploughing the black earth of two times, which is a Mandelstam reference I mentioned before in the context of the doubling of the date and pain. Of course, the resonance with the Holocaust is not accidental; both alternatives resonate in the poem—let’s keep in mind that Celan writes for those who remember the dead exist. But in the context of address, which is at stake at this moment of the poem, Mandelstam takes the fore.

The idea of ploughing the abyssal strata of time that Celan refers to in the radio essay is actually based on a fragment from Mandelstam’s “The Word and Culture” (1921). If we read it closely, we see that what Celan writes is not exactly “faithful” to its originary context and that, in this sense too, a thin layer of ash covers the radio-essay pages.

Poetry is the plough that turns up time in such a way that the abyssal strata of time, its black earth, appears on the surface. There are epochs, however, when mankind is not satisfied with the present, yearning like the ploughman for the abyssal strata of time. Revolution in art inevitably leads to Classicism, not because David reaped the harvest of Robespierre, but because that is what the earth desired.

recognizes that language finds itself always exposed to and aware of the other, that it has always become an address to the other” (148).

One often hears: that is good but it belongs to yesterday. But I say: yesterday has not yet been born. It has not yet really existed. I want Ovid, Pushkin and Catullus to live once more, and I am not satisfied with the historical Ovid, Pushkin and Catullus. (Mandelstam 113)

A few differences stand between Celan's reflection and this one. In the first place, Mandelstam doesn't start by speaking about the direction or "the tension of the times" between one person and another but only about a vaster time. More concretely, about a time that is concerned with the historicity of literature and literary history. In this essay, Classicism is defined very generally as "that which must be and that has not already been" (114). Thus it describes the repeatability and singularity of art, which becomes absolutely clear in the second paragraph with the claim that Ovid, Pushkin and Catullus need to live once more. Therefore, the abyssal strata of time has to do with the possibility of singular voices appearing over and over again, always differently, in time. In the late 40's, Celan wrote a short note that already announced one of the main topics of his poetry, the route from the "where-from" to the "where-to:" "in poetry one does not wait to hear the signal when telephoning" (MKR 12). This is, in a sense, at the bottom of Mandelstam's reflection: the idea that writers like Ovid, Pushkin and Catullus are always still travelling in time.

Celan himself modifies this approach to time. In the radio-essay, "time ploughing" becomes the event of reading each poem. On this basis we can say that both passages deal with the question of address but on very different scales. If we go back to the seafarer example, we are speaking about the vast time it takes for the letter to arrive and be found at the shore, and the event of reading the letter and noting the date. The interesting twist is that for Celan the first slips into the second and sending does not cease in the event of reading; in fact, that is the only thing that is possible and meant to be read. This is why he writes that when he speaks "in *this direction* (...) about poetry—no, about the poem (...)," he is "talking about a poem which does not exist! The absolute poem—no that certainly does not exist, cannot exist! But there is indeed in each real poem, even in the most unassuming poem, this irrecusable question, this outrageous claim" (MDM 10). The absolute poem cannot exist in the same way that Ovid, Catullus and Pushkin have not yet been born; reading is an event that cannot be completed. It is not "word-material" or a finished product.

In another note from the speech's preparation material, Celan wrote that a poem is an "Event = Eyevent?" (98). This way he shifts the *poietic* stress on creation to perception.⁶⁴ In what sounds like a neoplatonic formulation except for the end, another note says: "In the gaze of the onlooker the gazed at awakes – but it does not awake to eternal life" (136). This sentence describes his poetic stance accurately, especially the last clarification which stresses the temporal aspect of the eyevent, because poems "speak you-finite" (167). It's only when the onlooker gazes at the poem—and it splits, becomes unreadable—that the poem actually awakens. Hence, Celan writes that "the poem becomes—under what conditions!—the poem of someone who always still—perceives, it becomes conversation—often a desperate conversation" (9). If we think about this from the point of view of the reader we are drawn back to a sentence from the Mandelstam essay: "the eye, talking with the perceived, and pained (...) accompanies the poem into its underground" (219). The event of hearing the voice and voiceless, simultaneously, resists the creation of the absolute poem.

In order to speak about the interdependence of the opening of the times, Celan transcribes another part of the Mandelstam radio-essay:

Only in the space of this conversation does the addressed constitute itself, as it gathers around the I addressing and naming it. But the addressed which through naming has, as it were, become a you, brings its otherness into this present. Even in the here and now of the poem—for the poem itself, we know, has only this one, unique, momentary present—even in its immediacy and nearness it lets the most essential aspect of the other speak: its time. (*MDM* 9)⁶⁵

Celan is referring to the (often desperate) conversation that a poem becomes when perceived by an attentive reader who is "turned toward phenomena, questioning and addressing these" (9). The passage goes further into the nature of this conversation and what it actually means to be part of the poetic event. First of all, naming is added to the possibility of addressing the other, something that already came up in "Slate-eyed one." The importance of the name is connected to the phenomenality of the "you" who

⁶⁴ Let's recall that this is one of acmeism's principles. The emphasis on perception is one of the points that Mandelstam uses to distance himself from the symbolists.

⁶⁵ "The earlier radio-essay version has a few variations that I will underline here: "In the space of this conversation the addressed constitutes itself, becomes present, gathers itself around the I that addresses and names it. But the addressed, through naming, as it were, become a you, brings its otherness and strangeness into this present. Yet even in the here and now of the poem, even in its immediacy and nearness it lets its distance have its say too, it guards what is most its own: its time" (*MDM* 216).

appears at the edge of itself, exposed to the other as it is addressed. Naming helps stress and affirm each addressee's condition of otherness, and the reader is both an addressor and an addressee. Fynsk points out that "we may speak appropriately in the terms of *the* other and *the* difference the poem seeks. But Celan underscores the radically temporal character of this difference" (173). I would not say "but," as Fynsk puts it, but "because."

Hamacher writes that, in the "desperate conversation" of poetic encounter, "the reciprocal determination of the 'you' and the 'I' which appeared to classical metaphysics and even to dialogists to be possible as an intersubjective event, is referred to its lack of an object by means of interruption and immanent muteness" (241). He is arguing that the exposure of times in the poetic encounter thwart the possibility of an intersubjective event, or a cocreation because a non-actualisable negativity is unleashed that interrupts the completion of the poem and thwarts the presence of the subjectivities involved through "muteness." In this way, the poem makes space for otherness through unsharability. Celan's concern with the borders of language, the subject at the edge of time, and the Heideggerian relationship between language and finitude definitively don't adjust to the terms of answerability and reciprocity that rest on completion and correspondence. And neither do they adjust to the notion of divine presence conjured, for Martin Buber, in mutual address. Nevertheless, Celan's understanding of address and relation are influenced by Buber's dialogic encounter, because the idea that the addressed only constitutes itself and becomes a "you" around the poem that addresses and names it is an idea developed by the latter, even though Celan secularizes and unworks the subject that "you" is. Because of their proximity, I will now develop the relationship between their work.⁶⁶

⁶⁶ In 1960, Celan sent Nelly Sachs two phonograph records of Buber reading. There is no doubt that he felt an affinity with his work, Felstiner even recalls that, the day they met, Celan knelt down before him. Maurice Friedman says that "Celan, like his friend Nelly Sachs, was greatly influenced by Martin Buber's interpretation and presentation of (...) Hasidim, as he was by Buber's philosophy of dialogue in general. In the speech that he gave when he received the Bremen Literary Prize, Celan speaks not only of the East European landscape that was home to Hasidism, but also of 'those Hasidic tales which Martin Buber has retold for us all in German (...).' The extent to which Celan uses Buber's language and strives to meet what Buber calls 'the eternal Thou' is astonishing: he invokes the 'Gegenüber' [partner, one who is face to face] to which the poem addresses itself, the poem as a 'Gespräch' [dialogue] with the 'other' sphere, a 'Begegnung [meeting] with it'" (45). Years before this Lyon wrote: "If one were to map out Celan's poetic world and superimpose it on the philosophical landscape of I-Thou that Martin Buber has plotted for our age, grid coordinates would converge at many points. Even where they do not, they have been laid out in language, thought, and imagery that, despite apparent differences, testify to close spiritual and linguistic proximity" ("Paul Celan and Martin Buber" 110). There are two places in *The Meridian* drafts where Celan

Perhaps the best place to start tracing the relationship between them is with Celan's use of the word "presence" in the speech: "...the poem is—(...) one person's language-become shape, and, according to its essence, presentness and presence" (*MDM* 9). These last two words stand out because the poem has a "congenital darkness" that unleashes otherness and defies the idea of a fully present subject. However, in *I and Thou* these categories are defined in a very particular way that explains why Celan uses them: "The real, filled present exists only in so far as the actual presentness, meeting and relation exist. The present arises only in virtue of the fact that the *Thou* becomes present. (...) True beings are lived in the present" (Buber 27). As we can see, "actual presentness" refers to the happening of relation. This means that the "Thou" only appears *in* relation and that presence means the appearance of the "Thou" as much as the moment of relation. Thus, the temporality of this encounter is similar to the temporality of each poem for Celan, because a poem only exists as relation takes place.

Moreover, Buber's concern with the encounter has a similar root to Celan's. Just as *The Meridian* separates art and poetry, Buber's philosophy of dialogue differentiates two ways of relating to the world: the world to be used and the world to be met. "[T]his twofoldness runs through the whole world, through each person, each human activity" (8), which is why he ultimately says that there are two primary words: "I-It" and "I-Thou." To the former correspond experience, objectivity, utility and consciousness; to the second, presentness, pure relation with spirit and all living beings. The human being moves amongst both words: "[w]ithout IT, man cannot live. But he who lives with IT alone is not a man..." (44).

Nevertheless, for Buber the world to be met, the "I-Thou" relation, has a mystical base: in the encounter spirit is present. Whilst the holy is present in Buber's encounter, for Celan what is present is finite temporality. Buber argued that modern individualism distanced people from the spirit, which "is not in the I but between the *I* and *Thou*. It is not like the blood that circulates in you, but like the air in which you breathe. Man lives in the spirit if he is able to respond to this Thou. He is able to if he enters in relation with his whole being" (49). His philosophy tried to remedy the separation amongst individuals by reflecting on the in-between space that we have in common and which he mystically calls spirit. That is where "I" and "Thou" are in relation. But, just like the art-poetry relationship for Celan, the "I-Thou" relationship is

mentions Buber's name: 1. "M.Buber, in conversation (Vico:) There are two times that run parallel, a "holy" and a "profane" one" (131), 2. " 'Breath-units' (Buber)" (23).

also interruptive and discontinuous: “*It* is the eternal chrysalis, the *Thou* [is] the eternal butterfly—except that situations do not always follow one another in clear succession, but often there is a happening profoundly twofold, confusedly entangled” (31). Buber calls the continuous return from having been in relation, the falling back into the “*It*,” “the exalted melancholy of our fate” (30).

What probably drew Celan to Buber’s reflection on the “*I* and *Thou*” relationship is that the sphere of relation with other people takes place in language; consequently, language’s capacity to set up relations is privileged over its capacity to signify:

In the relation sphere of our life with men language is consummated as a sequence, in speech and counter speech. Here alone does the word that is formed in language meet its response. Only here does the primary word go backwards and forwards in the same form, the word of address and the word of response live in the one language, *I* and *Thou* take their stand not merely in relation but also in the solid give-and-take of talk. The moments of relation are here, and only here bound together by means of the element of speech in which they are immersed (...) true address receives true response. (Buber 99)

Accordingly, relation takes place in three different spheres: nature, our life with other people, and spiritual beings. Since God is pure relation, he is present in the three of them. In the second sphere, which this passage is referring to, relation takes place in language: in speech and counter-speech. The very possibility that language has of saying “*Thou*,” of addressing, is extremely important for Buber since “primary words bring out existence only by being spoken” (19). This is very similar to how Celan argues that the addressed are constituted only when they are spoken to. For Buber, the back and forth movement between the addressed “*Thou*” and the “*I*” creates a sense of correspondence that makes one essential for the appearance of the other, so the twofold nature of being is set forth: every “*Thou*” is “*I-Thou*” and the same goes for every “*I*.”

This is similar to what occurs, for Celan, when the addressed “*you*” is confronted by the date of the other, but whilst for Buber “between you and it there is a mutual giving: you say *Thou* to it and give yourself to it, it says *Thou* to you and gives itself to you” (43), the fine layer of ash that covers Celan’s poems comes in the way of this reciprocity. Buber’s encounter conjures the eternal; Celan’s conjures finitude. Celan himself sets the limit between them (but it’s also an invocation) by describing poetic

dialogue as a “desperate” dialogue. This way he puts reciprocity into question by describing a mode of dialogue in which “non-correspondence lends the strange relief and phenomenality.” His version of what we might call *finite dialogue* leaves space for difference, for the withdrawal of meaning and presence that is part of poetry’s “congenital darkness.”

If we return to Lucile’s “counterword” in this light, we now see that “long live the king” is also an answer, but an unworking one that “pays homage to the majesty of the absurd as witness for the presence of the human” (*MDM* 3). Retrospectively, since the very beginning, *The Meridian* announces a very particular poetics of reception, as well as the difference and proximity between both thinkers: this response sets Lucile and Camille in relation through finitude –and the withdrawal of meaning– rather than spirit. Yet it does bear witness to the *presence of the human*, if we think of presence as sheer relationality.

“Aber,” from *Sprachgitter*, puts forth the presentness of poetry, marked by finitude:

(Du
fragst ja, ich
sags dir:)

Strahlengang, immer, die
Spiegel, nachtweit, stehn
gegeneinander, ich bin,
hingestoßen zu dir, eines
Sinnes mit diesem
Vorbei.

Aber: mein Herz
ging durch die Pause, es wünscht dir
das Aug, bildnah und zeitstark,
das mich verformt–:

die Schwäne,
in Genf, ich sah’s nicht, flogen, es war,
als schwirrte, vom Nichts her, ein Wurfholz

ins Ziel einer Seele: soviel
 Zeit
 denk mir, als Auge, jetzt zu:
 daß ichs
 schwirren hör, näher – nicht
 neben mir, nicht,
 wo du nicht sein kannst. (PC 135)⁶⁷

The first thing we notice about this poem is that it starts by explaining that the speaker is responding. This stresses the idea that *poiesis* is centered on receptivity and not creation or power, and on perception instead of representation. It is presented as a counterscript. Perhaps the need for an explanation (*Since you ask...*) rises from the speaker's awareness that the strange(r) can never respond completely, because the "abyssal strata of time" gets in the way. And then we must also think about why the explanation is put in parenthesis: to symbolize interruption and perhaps the intermittent temporality of the response itself; or about how the title relates to that particular segment: *Aber* (but), an adversative that aims to negate or contrast with what has just been said, as if it were a "counterpoem." Even from the title the poem announces that, like Lucile's cry, it is an overlap of address and response.

The next stanza describes the poetic space of travel, the displacement from "you to you," as an optical phenomenon. Räsänen clarifies that "Strahlengang" is "a special term referring to the stream of rays through a lens or an optical instrument" (276), like how a camera works, hence the reference to the remote and darkened mirrors whose function is, in this context, more perceptive rather than reflective. This stanza makes the relation of the speaker and the "you" whom the poem is driven to (the two who are confronted –*gegeneinander*– in the encounter) revolve around the notion of perception and the gaze, which is coherent with Celan's description of each poem as an "eyeevent." At the end of that stanza the speaker speaks of its inclination to the other and mentions a common agreement in the passage, as if the addressee had also some responsibility in

⁶⁷ I have not been able to find a published translation in English of this poem. For this reason I am quoting it in German in the main text and have attempted the following translation myself: *But* // (Since / you ask / I'll tell you:) // Stream-of-rays, always, the / mirrors, night-distant, standing / face-to-face, I am, / coming to you, in agreement / with the passing. // But: my heart / went through a Pause, the eye wishes / you, image-near and time-strong / deforming me–: // The Swans / in Geneva, I didn't see it, they flew, it was, / as if out of nowhere a boomerang buzzed, / with the soul as a target: so much / Time / Designate it, as an eye, to me: / that I / hear it buzzing, closer – not / next to me, not, / where you can't be.

letting the stream of rays go through; after all it is the reader's decision to take that leap, which is an act of freedom, as Lucile's "Long live the king." The decision to take a stand in relation is also addressed by Buber: "He who takes his stand in relation shares in a reality (...). All reality is an activity in which I share something without being able to appropriate it for myself" (67).

In the third stanza we start to see the singularity of the speaker turn to ash by means of the "Pause" (a breathturn!) –the unbridgeable gap between one and the other. The desired eye stands strong in its own time, stronger and stronger, as the image of the other and its nothingness get closer; this is, as the speaker and its language are *verformt* (deformed, losing shape). But then, just before the speaker vanishes, we get a glimpse of something personal: a memory of swans in Geneva, a missed memory –maybe it is a memory of an anecdote that someone told the speaker– into which we can see no better than the speaker. All we can do is touch the verges with our fingertips, like the blind man.

"Attention," Celan quotes in *The Meridian*, "is the natural prayer of the soul" (9). This is what the poem asks of the addressee next: "*soviel Zeit / denk mir, als Auge, jetzt zu...*" To stand close to the speaker, perceptively, where the recipient's singularity turns to ash too, where the addressee cannot be ("*wo du nicht sein kann*"), in the vicinity of the poem. In the "eyevent" of this poem there is an irredeemable distance between the poem and the reader, a silence that can't be filled. Derrida calls this the "most intimate essence of solitude" ("Shibboleth" 5), which is none other than the stone we hear stand in every poem. It's precisely in this sense that Celan writes: "The poem is lonely. It is lonely and *en route*. Its author remains added to it. But doesn't the poem therefore already at its inception stand in the encounter—in the mystery⁶⁸ of the encounter?" (MDM 9) From this perspective it's possible to affirm that Celan's poetics give way to a common loneliness.

Waters lucidly stresses that for Celan poems are "a gift that (...) may be going unopened through the world like a sealed letter. The thought is accompanied by the loneliness, then, that you who receive the message cannot share it either" (111). In this respect we also face the "tragedy of destination" that I developed regarding Derrida's *The Post Card* and Dickinson's epistolary structure of address. For all these authors, each

⁶⁸ Celan uses the German word "*Geheimnis*" which is usually translated into English versions of the speech as mystery, although it can also mean secret.

“post card” unleashes a movement of loss, because in order for a poem to be readable it must lose something in the name of the other it heads toward.

When *The Meridian* comes near the end it becomes more ontological in the sense that the poem’s primordial incompleteness ends up being part of who the addressee (reader and writer) is too, like the “you” held in the vocal-cords bridge of “Slate-eyed one.” Thus, like Nancy, for whom literature and being share a similar structure, Celan points to the idea that being is an open plurality, like every poem, and that the poetic exposure of finitude brings this out. Poems, he writes, “are encounters, routes of a voice to a perceiving you, (...) blueprints for being perhaps, a sending oneself ahead toward oneself, in search of oneself... A kind of homecoming” (11). A homecoming in which one finds out, by being a guest of the poem, that it is actually no one’s “own” home, that “oneself” is always at the edge of one’s own time, that even the writer is also a guest in the inexistent poem. This is what the reference to a meridian recalls:

Ladies and gentlemen, I find something that consoles me a little for having in your presence taken this impossible route, this route of the impossible.

I find what connects and leads, like the poem, to an encounter.

I find something—like language—immaterial, yet terrestrial, something circular that returns to itself across both poles while—cheerfully—even crossing the tropics: I find...
a meridian. (12)

The meridian is a concept that condenses Celan’s reflection on the black earth that each pole attempts to plough, opening up one’s time as the other’s turns to ash. Meridians are imaginary lines used to determine time and location, they are like the impossible routes of poetry, that connect two people to each other at the same time as they make space for the strange. The first place the motif of the meridian appears in Celan’s material is in a letter that Nelly Sachs sent him on the 28th of October 1959: “Between Paris and Stockholm runs the meridian of pain and comfort” (Celan & Sachs 14). This beautiful, personal sentence summarizes their relationship: their friendship initially fed on the pain of being Jewish poets that survived the Holocaust, which is why they found comfort in their correspondence; they shared something not many could understand, they kept each other company in the loneliness that their pain confined them to. Between Paris and Stockholm ran a caring yet distanced understanding, ran a letter that could always not arrive but fortunately and most of the times did, ran the patience and the impatience of

receiving an answer and the joys of sending one. This sentence holds what I've been trying to say, *voice and voiceless at the same time*.

In this chapter I've attempted to show that the connection Celan makes between address and finitude unworks communication (the symmetrical exchange of meaning –the give and take of dialogue) and the possibility of making and reading a complete poem. His poems are unworking to the extent that even the writer is not regarded as a maker but as a sender/destinatory; a simultaneity of roles that can only be achieved by “inclining the subject at the edge of itself,” to the outside—which is different to the “outside of the human” that *The Meridian* calls “artistic.” The poetic outside refers to a way of being in which finitude sets us free when we are in relation to others—and otherness. Following and transforming Buber's philosophy, Celan calls this “the *presence* of the human.” Since *The Meridian* is a “desperate dialogue” with Mandelstam, in which passages from Celan's recorded response to his work are literally transcribed into the speech, it should also be considered a metaspeech on the way address and reception overlap; to read it aloud one would have to “do the police in different voices,” as T.S. Elliot initially planned on calling his open and multiple *Waste Land*.

4. Unworking Poetics and Communities

4.1. DICKINSON AND BLANCHOT: UNEMPLOYABLE NEGATIVITY

In her edition of Dickinson's late loose writings, *Emily Dickinson's Open Folios* (1995), Marta Werner gives these scraps of paper a fictitious voice: "What is a work?" These uncollected leaves whisper, "A theory of the work does not exist" (47).⁶⁹ In response, I wish we could ask them if the opposite exists, a theory of unwork. Since that's impossible, I have taken an alternative approach by engaging with a philosophical and theoretical discussion of unwork, and then listening to Dickinson's writing that unworks itself. I will now finally relate them to one another. It has come to my attention that no matter how clear it is becoming that Dickinson's work defies genre, as well as the commercial and hermeneutic regulations of literature (to name only a couple of the many it defies) something hasn't been done yet: to relate her work, as a work that defies the logic of work, with a philosophical discussion that theorizes precisely on the interruption and withdrawal of this logic and claims that literature is a site where unworking (*désœuvrement*) takes place.

Most of the scholarly work relating to the state of Dickinson's manuscripts is aimed at revaluing her figure and work in the light of a history of mis-editing and mis-publication that has had socio-political effects on the representation of Dickinson's figure and on her work's place in literary history. Werner's position belongs to this trend of revaluing, even though she does acknowledge that Dickinson's work questions the logic of the work itself: "If we dared publish Dickinson's late writings as she left them, they would deeply disturb the privileged idea of the work itself, so long associated in our accounts of literary History with the twinned concepts of closure and totality" (36). I am interested in using the enlightening groundwork and editions that have resulted from these approximations to examine the theoretical implications of Dickinson's

⁶⁹ Werner develops this idea further in the essay "Itineraries of Escape: Emily Dickinson's Envelope Poems," included in *The Gorgeous Nothings*. For the past years, she has tried to explore, as a scholar, writer and editor, "the relationship between message and medium and to follow as far as possible, the trajectory of her [Dickinson's] desire to inscribe herself outside all institutional accounts of order" (*Open Folios* 45). Some of the most relevant issues of the debate of unworking literature and communities are latent in Werner's work although she doesn't have that debate in mind and is mostly concerned with making sure Dickinson's work and figure is accurately published, represented and discussed. She follows Susan Howe's groundbreaking work in this respect (which recently took the form of an art exhibit Howe curated herself: *I'm Nobody! Who are You? The Life and Poetry of Emily Dickinson*. Morgan Library and Museum, New York, January 20-May 28, 2017).

transgression of the twinned concepts of closure and totality beyond its implications in literary history. I want to examine the significance of disturbing the privileged idea of the work, which ties literature to the question of an unworking and unavowable relation.

The concepts of closure and totality aren't only central to the idea of the book, but also to a predominant and dialectical understanding of the subject and communication. Werner claims that Dickinson's work only abandons dialectic procedures (by this she means an inclination to unity and the moment of identity) in the late, fragmentary poems. However, some of her early and middle period texts—even poems bound into the fascicles (a domestic simulacrum of the concept of the book)⁷⁰ — have a structure of address that unworks each poem, renders it incomplete or fissured by the disappearance of the lyric subject, the movement of sending, and the deferral of the reader's presence. This is made possible by her poetry's appropriation of the structure of epistolary correspondence, as much as by the centrality that she gives to—and the lessons she learns from—the ongoing loss of the dying other, a movement of loss and self-displacement which turns out to be practically contagious for the vigil. Therefore, my point is that Dickinson's resistance to commercializing her work and publishing it in a book has the same basis as her poetic structure of address and the relationship with the readers it opens: investment in ongoing loss.

This paradoxical inclination to invest in squander must be revised in the light of the discussion between Blanchot and Nancy on unworking communities, which explores the relationship between literature and community in response to Bataille's notions of communication and expenditure. Specifically, Dickinson's work should be explored in light of Blanchot's reflections, because in both of their works writing is a “dispossessing gift” that sets us in relation through loss and lack rather than, as Nancy argues, the ontological exposure of singular-plural beings.⁷¹

For Blanchot, the problem of how the book and the work are bound to a negativity that cannot be actualized, and that shatters the possibility of closure and totality, is a constant concern. This is the same problem that has driven Dickinson

⁷⁰ According to Werner, after 1864 Dickinson “abandoned even the minimal bibliographical apparatus of the fascicles, along with their dialectical structure to explore language as free in practice as in theory and to induce the unbinding of the scriptural economy” (*Open Folios* 3).

⁷¹ Blanchot thinks of community as a “relation that challenges the notion of being as continuity or as unity or gathering of beings; a relation that would except itself from the problematic of being and would pose a question that is not one of being. Thus, in this questioning, we would leave dialectics, but also ontology” (*The Infinite Conversation* 10).

scholars and editors to seek alternative ways of publishing her work.⁷² The issue is that Dickinson's poems make room for the illegible without making it become readable. Something very similar is at the heart of Blanchot's thought on the work of art. For him,

the artwork affirms itself in its refusal to become an effective work. Yet at the same time a product is realized (...). A work of art, a finished book or painting, is never an incarnation of pure non-actuality. It is a question of attending to the play of the non-actualisable reserve which Bataille calls (...) worklessness as it leaves its trace, its signature, in the unfolding of the work of art. Yet, through refusal, it suspends the moment of negativity upon which the articulation of actuality depends. It affirms a difference, a stubborn materiality that refuses to disappear in the moment of identity. (Iyer 57)

This passage addresses the challenge faced by editors of Dickinson's "*oeuvre*:" it refuses to be and to be handled like an effective work even though there is a material surface of inscription from which, at first glance, a product could be made, like the fascicles or poems on loose scraps of paper. Similarly, for Blanchot, the work of art retains the mark of a lack, of what it's not, that which exceeds it and cannot be "incarnated." By making room for non-actualisable negativity, two forms of refusal and resistance take place: there is an ontological refusal of the artwork being whole and present; and an economic resistance to becoming a product. The artwork cannot circulate in the literary market as a product because its ontological indetermination inscribes it in an economy of expenditure.

This is why the reference to Bataille in Iyer's passage is precise. Blanchot's

⁷² In the "Introduction" of *Dickinson's Poems as She Preserved Them*, Cristanne Miller distinguishes between Dickinson's "finished work" and "drafts;" thus, she takes a position in which she separates the "chaff from the wheat." In the introduction, she writes: "There is a qualitative as well as a quantitative difference between Dickinson's poems containing alternative substitutions for words or phrases in some number of a poem's lines and those containing so many potential substitutions that it is hard to get a sense of distinct progression in the poem. Whereas the former have the characteristics of a finished work, such as a capitalized word at the start of each poetic line, the latter often do not. I regard the latter poems as 'in draft,' although Marta Werner has persuasively argued that in her late years Dickinson may have developed a more fluidly developed style of writing" (7). Miller presents the alternative words as "substitutions" instead of understanding them as alternatives that could lead to simultaneous ways of making sense of one poem (not multiple ends or readings, which is where substitution takes us, but the plural singularity of each poem). This decision is also representative of the type of writer she thinks Dickinson was: a far less avant-garde poet than scholars like Werner and Howe insist on. Her decision to only publish and include the alternative words of finished poems excludes the possibility of enhancing each poem with difference and dispersion. However, as the best of Dickinson's editors do, Miller is following her own, well-informed position, finding her own way to leap into the darkness of these poems. As Werner and Howe insisted in a recently published conversation, any transcription of Dickinson's manuscripts is always fallen (Howe and Werner 131).

reflection on worklessness is influenced by the former's theory of a general economy and non-productive expenditure. Let's recall that in Bataille's economic project excess wealth is squandered instead of invested or saved. In this respect, Dickinson's poetic economy anticipates Bataille's. It's not only manifested in the state in which her work was found but also in her poems and letters. We saw this earlier with my reading of "The Chemical conviction / that Nought be lost / Enable in Disaster / My fractured Trust:" *contra* the chemical principle that nothing be lost (and *contra* the aim of a Trust fund), her writing is a conscious and paradoxical investment in loss. Let's not forget the famous letter to Otis Lord in which she writes: "don't you know that 'No' is the wildest word that we *consign* to language" (L562 617).

Blanchot's notion of worklessness significantly picks up on the connection that Bataille makes in *Inner Experience* between economic and ontological expenditure. When Bataille meditates about writing and community in this text, communication is said to squander the being of the one who speaks: "the subject in the experience (...) loses itself in human communication, insofar as the subject throws itself outside of itself, it ruins itself in an indefinite crowd of possible existences" (66). This is similar to what occurs in Dickinson's poems in cases where the lyric subject disappears as address and sending take the fore. In "Going to Her! Happy Letter," for instance, the lyrical subject instructs the letter/poem to share its refusal, to expose its omissions—not the content of what is omitted, only the empty spaces that resist "the moment of identity" as it is addressed to "indefinite, possible existences."

Dickinson's case is special in this regard: her "fractured trust" is an affirmation of the practice of squander and of the disruption, by writing's excess negativity, of "the twinned concepts of totality and closure." Now, Bataille and Blanchot maintain that language *essentially* bears an excess negativity that writing squanders. Language withdraws as it communicates. Therefore, whatever editorial processes Dickinson's work undergoes it will always encounter resistance to totality and identity. What makes her case so special, and her worklessness so demanding, is that Dickinson is a sovereign writer in Bataille's terms: she *decides* to invest in loss, to consign "No," to language. In *The Infinite Conversation* Blanchot writes:

[M]an is the being that does not exhaust negativity in action. Thus when all is finished, when the "doing" (by which man also makes himself) is done, when, therefore, man has nothing left to do, he must, as Georges Bataille expresses it with the most simple

profundity, exist in a state of “negativity without employ”(…). Should he come to sense this surplus of nothingness, this unemployable vacancy (...), then he must respond to another exigency, no longer that of producing but spending, no longer that of succeeding but failing, no longer that of turning out works and speaking usefully but of speaking in vain and reducing himself to worklessness... (206)

There are no better words than these to describe Dickinson’s “surplus of nothingness,” her decision to invest in loss, to affirm worklessness, refuse publication, circulation, monetary compensation and success. In a way, an implicit theory of unwork does run through her work. She speaks of it in many of her poems, but we also come across it symptomatically –as in the problems that arise when thinking about how to make a book with her scraps– or performatively. Dickinson’s spider poems provide important support in this respect.

Spiders are disquieting presences in her poems, which scholars typically interpret in mainly two ways. One of the most traditional feminist studies of her poetry, by Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar (1979), claims that Dickinson’s spiders represent a “spinster’s” sexual decay, as well as, simultaneously, an emblem of an artist who stitches together the fragments of her fractured self (632). Since my research is on work and worklessness, I’m mostly interested in this second line: the spider as artist, which is predominant in later interpretations. The link between the spider and the artist is significant because it is grounded specifically on the artist’s work, rather than on his or her persona.

Interpretations that follow the spider-artist line vary in regard to the proposed connection between the spider’s work and the artist’s work. Alike Barnstone argues that the spider is the emblem of art, the voice of a “subterranean level of consciousness” which “comes bringing ecstasies of creativity” (138). I agree with Alexandra Socarides, who, in *Dickinson Unbound* (2012), relates the spider’s work to Dickinson’s work on account of the “unemployable merit and genius of this creature who makes art amongst the items of the household” (145).⁷³ Moreover, she refers to Dickinson’s collages, to her use of pins and needles to put pieces of paper together, as a kind of stitching. Socarides’s take on the unemployability of the spider’s work is key to start understanding

⁷³At this point of her text Socarides is thinking about a poem that also articulates the relationship between unemployed negativity and waste: “The Spider as an Artist / Has never been employed – / Though his surpassing Merit / Is freely certified / By every Broom and Bridget / Throughout a Christian Land – / Neglected Son of Genius / I take thee by the Hand – ” (M519).

Dickinson's spider poems as metapoems that reflect on writing's worklessness. Let's look at two.

The Spider holds a Silver Ball
In unperceived Hands –
And dancing softly to Himself [softly] as He knits
His Yarn of Pearl - unwinds -

He plies from nought to nought -
In unsubstantial Trade -
Supplants our Tapestries with His -
In half the period -

An Hour to rear supreme
His Continents of Light - [His] theories
Then dangle from the Housewife's Broom - [Then] perish by
His - Boundaries - forgot - [His] sophistries
(M251)

This poem starts with a solitary spider, which no one sees and knows of, unwinding the material that it will weave the tapestry (the text) with. We might get the idea that the spider is representing a writer; but the focus is not on the subject but on the work that is being done. The second stanza speaks about the worklessness or surplus of nothingness that is being worked with: the spider plies from “nought to nought,” which can refer to both the content of what’s said as to the wherefrom and whereto, thus alluding to a poetic utopia and a temporality with no beginning or end. At the same time, it can also be interpreted as the two sides of address: from no one to nobody, or maybe just as the material with which it is (un)working: nothing. Maybe it’s all of these, but the next line fits the last two hypotheses best: no transaction can happen when there is nothing or nothing of value to transact, and when there is no one on either side to carry out the transaction. The nothingness that is being plowed cannot enter the realm of trade; it is not a commodity. The next four lines allude to the bright, transient glory of this worthless product, which is ultimately made from nothing and destined to nothing: to oblivion, the housewife’s broom—it’s only waste. This poem bears witness to a poet who seriously thought about her work. By choosing to describe the spider’s work this way it becomes evident that Dickinson was conscious of an unworking inclination to

squander.

Dickinson critics, editors, and scholars don't know what to do with these powerless, unemployable tapestries. Her resisting of production with useless squander, of success with failure, and of utility with banality and waste, was initially explained through the myth of a romantic, withdrawn and repressed poet. The editing and marketing processes of her work supported this myth until very recently, which is why most editions and translated editions of her poems transform or leave out her formal, grammatical, material, and semantic transgressions. This doesn't only misrepresent Dickinson; it is also an attempt to exclude writing's illegible worklessness, its resistance to the moment of identity that would unify a book and turn writing into a profitable product limited to symmetrical transactions.

But worklessness can't just be "left out" of works of writing. In the Dickinson editions most people are likely to own, the dashes in between words or at the end of lines are unsettling; they evoke much more silence and space than they actually show, like hauntings from her original manuscripts. These are traces of the worklessness that editors, and our reading habits, are inclined to overlook. The "disturbing" strength of Dickinson's poetry is the affirmation of an inexhaustible negativity that leaves its mark and is ceaselessly unleashed in spite of how it is published, although the closer we get to the original manuscripts the more traces of non-actualisable negativity we encounter.

In another spider poem, we can see how writing's worklessness overtakes and exceeds the subject (the writer outside the poem and the lyric subject). In fact, in regard to the previous poem, Socarides argues that the male gendered spider serves the purpose of distinguishing Dickinson-the-female-writer from the subject doing the work in the poem. It also signals a break with a tradition that links female creativity to domestic work like weaving and knitting (Ariadne and Penelope). Therefore, weaving *from nought to nought* makes space—empty space—as it dislodges fixed identities from the written text. Dickinson once wrote that "Nature is a Haunted House – but Art – a House that tries to be haunted (Letter 459a 554). Spiders crawl into her poems to haunt them; we see this in the following poem from 1870:

Alone and in a circumstance

Reluctant to be told

A spider on my reticence

Assiduously crawled

deliberately - determinately - impertinently [crawled]

And so much more at Home than I
Immediately grew
I felt myself a visitor
and hurriedly withdrew

Revisiting my late abode with articles of claim
I found it quietly assumed as a Gymnasium
Where 'Tax asleep and 'Title off
The inmates of the Air
Perpetual presumption took
As each were special Heir –
If any strike me on the street
I can return the Blow –
If any take my property
According to the Law
'The Statute is my learned friend
But what redress can be
For an offence nor here nor there [offence] ~~not~~ [here nor there] - [not] anywhere
So not in Equity –
'That Larceny of time and mind
The marrow of the Day
By spider, or forbid it Lord
That I should specify – (M549)

This poem also begins with a description of the solitary and unseen scenery of writing. This is the poem that Barnstone has in mind when she writes that Dickinson's spiders give voice to a subterranean level of consciousness. But rather than thinking of this poem as a process in which something is brought to light (which, as we will see, the rest of the poem does not sustain), I understand it as an opening, made by writing, of space and darkness.⁷⁴ In "Literature and the Right to Death," Blanchot states that language

⁷⁴ Barnstone is not alone here. Gilbert and Gubar also think this poem is about Dickinson's repressed selves and sexuality coming into light through writing. In "Scraps, Stamps, and Cutouts: Emily Dickinson's Domestic Technologies of Publication" Jeanne Holland argues for a predominantly psychoanalytic reading of the poem based on the relationship between the poem and a very small collage on the paper it is written on, which is made up by a stamp with a train on it and two slips of paper, small rectangles, with the names George Sand and Mauprat printed on each one. Nevertheless, she also provides a reflection on how spiders defeat the Law in this poem; she argues that since "spider is Dickinson's conventional shorthand

always begins with the void and that negation is always tied to language (40).⁷⁵ If the spider indeed represents writing, the poem is in agreement with Blanchot's reflection. It too announces that writing comes not from light but darkness: the spider, which quickly dislodges the speaker from the poem, has its point of departure in the speaker's reticence. That's where it starts to transform the place into a Gymnasium and banishes the subject, whose narrative bears witness to the fact that a poem is no place to dwell.⁷⁶ What makes this place uninhabitable by any subject is the work of the negative. The lyric subject is banished by the words crawling on the piece of paper. Like a spider unwinding thread, communication unwinds the incommunicable. Therefore, another logic reigns in the place that the spiders have occupied (they multiply as the poem develops). The speaker's home is not only transformed into a different place but also functions under an economy in which there is no gain or ownership (neither Tax nor Title).

The poem develops a comparative description between the economy and logic that reins outside of the spider territory, which is the operative world of symmetrical exchange and transactions—where one can “return a Blow” and claim the right of possession—and this inoperative place where there is no “Equity,” no obedience or even regard for the Law.⁷⁷ Once more there seems to be an anticipation of Bataille's thought on the expenditure of writing, for not only does the spider's work break the laws of a restricted economy but also, in this lawless place beyond locality (“an offence not here nor there, not anywhere”), what ultimately takes place is a suspension of the

for poet (...) the spider/poet as culprit suggests that writing is implicated in the transgression, causing the body to flee” (162).

⁷⁵ If needed, see pages 34-37 of chapter one in order to remember the philosophy of language that Blanchot follows here.

⁷⁶ Holland reminds us that Dickinson's Webster dictionary defined “Gymnasium” as a “place where athletic exercises were performed; originally, in *Greece*, by persons naked” (163) She relates this to “the carnivalesque scene that unfolds” and, I think more accurately, to the spiders taking “naked possession” or occupying this place (164).

⁷⁷ According to Blackstone's definition of “Equity” (his *Commentaries* on law were extremely influential in the United States during the 18th and 19th century. Dickinson was familiar with these terms since her brother and father were lawyers and it was also the definition used in her own Webster dictionary): “In *jurisprudence*, the correction or qualification of the law, when too severe or defective; or the extension of the words of the law to cases not expressed, yet coming with the reason of the law. Hence a court of equity or chancery, is a court which corrects the operation of the literal text of the law, and supplies its defects by reasonable construction, and by rules of proceeding and deciding which are not admissible in a court of law. Equity, then is the law of reason, exercised by the chancellor or judge, giving remedy in cases to which the courts of law are not competent” (Holland 164). By locating the poem beyond Equity, which is itself a bending of the Law, a widening and mending of its gaps, Dickinson's work grows even more transgressive, completely resistant to any form of law or institutionalized order or way of thinking—even of being. “B.J. Smith notes that while legal language can be found in roughly three hundred of Dickinson's poems (38), her usage of it changes. In the early poems (...) she tends to laugh at the law. ‘In later poems she looks at the law nostalgically in recognition of both its usefulness and uselessness’ (ibid, 40)” (Holland 180).

subject: the “Larceny of time and mind.” This expression can unwind in various ways: when someone robs you of your time it means that said person made you waste time, so it can refer to the useless, unemployable vacancy that writing can be. We can interpret the reference to the mind similarly: as a reference to the suspension of the production of meaning. And, more importantly, of self-consciousness. If we follow this path, the poem leads to the interruption of the speaking subject—given that temporality and consciousness determine it. For Dickinson, as for Bataille and Blanchot, the loss of the subject is the ultimate form of squander.

The next line is the last we are meant to hear before the speaker lets us know that not everything can be told and thus, cyclically (yet interruptedly), ends back where it started: reticence. What we are meant to hear is: “The marrow of the Day by spider.” This brings us back to a dialectical understanding of language, because the spider’s unwinding of negation turns into the marrow, the source of light. However, the poem ends with a non-actualisable negativity, with the illegible: “By spider; or forbid it lord that I should specify.” Suddenly we know something is missing, and the ending is suspended with an interruptive lack.

Loss constitutes the experience of writing and worklessness in Dickinson’s *oeuvre*. In this poem it occurs as the spider crawls on her reticence (already a stranger’s trace) in order to start writing. Furthermore, worklessness is also meant to dislodge the reader, not only the speaker of the poems. In this way the event of reading gives way to a relation based on separation and loss rather than identification, recognition and appropriation—but it’s intermittent, it only lasts as long as the poetic event. This is how the two aspects of her poetic structure of address (its relation to death and the model of epistolary correspondence) intertwine and become significant in the context of a reflection on literature and unworking communities.

In *The Unavowable Community* Blanchot says that the only disappearance that can equal that of death is the “disappearance that inscribes itself in writing, when the work which is its drifting is from the onset *the renunciation of creating a work*, indicating only the space in which resounds, for all and for each, and thus for nobody, the always yet to come words of the unworking” (46). Disappearance is always inscribed in writing because language originates in negation and is always meant for someone else. But we have to be cautious, because for Blanchot and Dickinson “nobody” is not a totally vacuumed subject; address opens a relation in which readers enter an ongoing

movement of loss, but never disappear completely. This is why they both stress “dying” over “death.” It is also why a relationship can be sustained between two people in the mode of loss and separation.⁷⁸ Thus, poetic address bears the excess negativity of dying and is responsible for its sharing or divide. Quite like the “tragedy of destination” that Derrida describes in *The Post Card*, and like Dickinson’s own epistolary logic, for Blanchot, writing is always addressed and at the same time impossible to receive.⁷⁹

4.1.1 THE DANGEROUS MOMENTS

As we saw in the first chapter, literature is unique for Blanchot because, following Bataille, he believes it can suspend the work of the negative, the process in which nothing is actualized and meaning appears. Literature “arrests the movement of death as such, arresting the dialectic that allows language to mean. (...) Literature seeks to grasp the movement of negation or dying that is its condition of possibility by means of the way in which it would use words” (Iyer 77). This understanding of literature contributes to a better understanding of Dickinson’s poems, which also release unemployable negativity by arresting “the dialectic that allows language to mean” and associate this suspension with dying. Let’s read the following late, loose, text from 1884:⁸⁰

⁷⁸ In *The Unavowable Community* Blanchot does not differentiate writing from speech “when the latter is not folded up in ways of speaking and hence does not permit any relation (of identity or alterity) with itself (...) Thus the gift of speech, a gift of ‘pure’ loss that cannot make sure of ever being received by the other, even though the other is the only one to make possible, if not speech, then at least the supplication to speak which carries with it the risk of being rejected or lost or not received” (12).

⁷⁹ Leslie Hill describes this deferring aspect as follows: “To arrive obviously implies a destination, a point in time or space at which it is possible to decide whether or not something has indeed arrived. To come, on the other hand, suggests an imminence or immobility that cannot be resolved, completed, or identified as such. For something to arrive, or not, in other words, it must in some sense be expected, whereas to come suggests that whatever comes, if it comes, is always forever futural: irreducible to possibility or to presence” (*A Change of Epoch* 145). This is what’s at stake in some of the poems with which I tried to explain the transgressive effects that Dickinson’s epistolary drive has over our traditional understanding of reading and reception. Writing as what is always yet to come is sustained and constantly deferred because of the excess negativity it bears. There is always something missing in what’s written and sent, and this excess negativity thwarts reception through a “forever futural” structure of address that attacks the self-present subject and the possibility of an absolute poem. That is why and how writing is meant “for each and for all, thus for nobody.”

⁸⁰ I will use Werner’s transcription from *Open Folios*, since it is typed but respects the spacing and the marks (she even uses a pen to do the latter). The pages are not numbered.

Tis a dange	is Death X whose
rous moment	if is everlasting
for any one	when I was a
when the meaning	little girl I called
goes out of things	the Cemetery
and Life stands	Tarry Town
straight - and	but now I
punctual X and	call it Trans -
yet no contents	a wherefore
comes- signal	but no more
Yet such no	and X the if
ments are	of Deity - Avalanche
If we survive	or Avenue - every
survive	Heart asks which
them they expand	
us , if we do	
not , but that	

Before the narrator appears as an “I” in the second column, there is no lyrical subject, and what’s written has a very interruptive form: there are wide gaps between words and two of them, “dangerous” and “moments” are cut off by line breaks. This relates to the text’s topic too, since it describes certain moments in which meaning is interrupted: things lose content or, rather, meaning ceases to be transmitted, no signal (the poem is syntactically ambiguous as to which of the two it is). The text announces that this suspension is dangerous but significant for those who go through the limit experience, which we may not survive—and here a “we” is designated for the first time, the poem speaks *to us*. It tells us that a dangerous momentary lack of meaning might expand us. It’s not clear what this expansion would consist of, but it would not make us more inclusive or whole but less closed upon ourselves, these moments unwork us too. This follows from the subsequent lines: “if we do not, but that is Death whose if is everlasting.” The syntactical ambiguity of: “if we do not, *but* that is” sheds a new light on what had already been said, which was that “Life stands straight – and punctual” when meaning is suspended.

When death is introduced with this syntax, it envelops the poem all the way back to the beginning; as if everything that had been said were death too. Of course, not surviving means death, which is the reason why this line is situated where it is: if we do

not survive *that is death*. The issue is that it literally reads: “if we survive them they expand us, if we do not, *but that is death* whose if is everlasting.” Coherent with Dickinson’s poetics of incompleteness and multiple possibilities, this syntax allows us to interpret the reference to death in more ways than as a consequence of not surviving. Death also becomes a name for the dangerous moments in which meaning ceases to come forth. These moments expand us with the same interruptive logic that transverses the poem visually and thematically: things lose content just as our being is fissured by the non-actualisable negativity that has always made us incomplete. We seek names for it since childhood, i.e. Death, Tarry Town; and even if we come to grips with it being our “wherefore,” it still exceeds us; one way in which it does this is that we don’t know how it will happen, perhaps in “avalanche” or “avenue,” a question the poem asks as it evokes the mysterious—or simply arbitrary—works of Fortune.⁸¹

Earlier I examined some of Dickinson’s texts on death in order to stress two main points. First, the movement of the other’s loss carries the witness along with it, creating a momentary relation based on an irreconcilable distance. Second, incommunicability is stressed whenever death comes up in these texts. In this way dying and these very particular relationships are also an experience of language and its limits, which we actually come into contact with as we read the previous poem and our eyes shift from blank to blank. As we are physically exposed to language’s unemployable vacancy an intimate form of relation takes place, but an intimacy without interiority. We accept the blank spaces between us, and the way they performatively put us in relation with the poem through separation. A relationship based on squander and strangeness is, precisely, an unworking community. Dickinson points to these unavowable relationships beautifully in this envelope poem: “Unknown - for all/ the times we met - / Estranged, however / intimate - / What a dissembling / Friend -” (GN 152).

⁸¹ Vivian R. Pollak believes that the dangerous moments the poem is referring to actually recall an unknown yet “horrifying psychological catastrophe” (44) in Dickinson’s life. Richard Brantley uses the poem from a less biographical perspective when he tries to make the case that Dickinson is a poet of experience who flirts with loss even though gain is always restored. In his reading, “expansion” refers to the experience gained from surviving “near-cancellation” or a “devastating emptiness.” He argues that, ultimately, in this poem things never lose content completely. This is not very accurate: the dangerous moments are definitely interruptive and not everlasting, but expansion does not necessarily mean gain. There is a poem in which Dickinson makes a list of all “the things that Death will buy” and one of them is “Room,” the expansion of empty space (F644 M325). Neither does it involve the movement of things recovering their meaning or meaning recovering its things as if they won’t get lost again. Brantley quotes a passage from a letter to Susan Gilbert Dickinson that I think works better for my position than his: “Emerging from an Abyss and reentering it – that is Life, is it not Dear?” (L1024 in Brantley 106)

Thinking about Dickinson's poetics in the light of the unworking not only shows that she thought of literature and relationships in ways that defy social and literary values that are still dominant today, but also that her writing transgresses them performatively. It opens the possibility of relating to and reading one another within a range of limits and impossibilities that require we stop reducing our use and understanding of language to "that which *represents*, and (...) [to] that which receives and gives *meaning*" (Blanchot, *The Infinite Conversation* 261), and start privileging and thinking about the mere conditions of possibility and impossibility of communication or address, which are limit experiences of language. Her poems squander a surplus of nothingness and open unemployable vacancies in which we have to let ourselves get lost.

Reading Dickinson and Blanchot together has allowed me to encounter and propose a theoretical explanation of why worklessness still haunts readers, even in the editions that attempt to reproduce her work as a whole. It has further allowed me to understand why her work values positively the "dangerous moments" in which the excess of death or language's negativity is squandered. During these moments we relate differently to ourselves and to others, through a limit experience of language that renounces and in which subjects refuse the violent tendencies to power, utility and gain that dominate life in common and absorb otherness. Dickinson's writing demonstrates that the inconstant and interruptive passages of communication described in *The Unavowable Community* do describe certain experiences of writing, reading and relating.

The discussion on literature and community initiated in the early '80s is very helpful for rethinking a work that doesn't subscribe to the norms and conventions of the literary institution, and that redefines literature as that which breaks down the boundaries of what it is and what it is not, thus breaking down the twinned concepts of closure and totality that usually determine it. Dickinson was a critical thinker who renounced the tradition of romantic and lyric expressivity in which language transmits and represents the speaker's subjectivity. She defied theories (and the possibility) of reception, and the patriarchal legacies of literature. At the same time, she preserved, cared for and transformed one of poetry's immemorial elements: address, the threshold to the other.

4.2. SKINS OF LANGUAGE: CELAN AND NANCY

It might be tempting to relate Celan to Blanchot since the latter wrote an essay on the poet, structured around a few poems from *Sprachgitter* and *Die Niemandrose*.⁸² In an essay that initially aims at exploring their relationship, Gerald Bruns acutely acknowledges that something similar to Blanchot's notion of worklessness is found in Celan's poetry because of its renunciation of the absolute poem (*Maurice Blanchot* 85). But Blanchot's unworking community involves the ongoing loss of its subjects, which isn't exactly the case for Celan. The primordial openness of the self that Celan calls a "homecoming" is better understood in light of Nancy's ontological approach to inoperative literature and community.

Scholars generally pay little attention to the "Literary Communism" section of *The Inoperative Community* because Nancy's focus on literature is subjected to a broader reflection on community and ontology. The section appears to be a strange side note to a greater philosophical project. In this regard, Devisch writes: "All identities are marked by an irreducible and inoperative difference. It is to such an inoperativeness that Nancy wanted to refer with his confusing concept of 'literary communism' (confusing since it has very little to do with that which we usually understand as literature or as communism)" (203). Another discouragement is that not even Nancy feels comfortable with what "literature" means in this text. A decade after its publication, in "Around the Notion of Literary Communism," he admitted that the project "sketched (in *The Inoperative Community* (...)) in order to indicate in 'literature' the truth of 'politics' now appears to me to require serious revision and amendment" (33). Nevertheless, this ambiguity broadens and displaces the horizon of possibilities of both fields.

In *The Inoperative Community*, Nancy clarifies that by "the political" he is referring to "a community ordering itself to the unworking of its communication (...) This does not imply a 'political will' but undergoing the experience of community as communication: it implies writing" (41). And, in *The Disavowed Community* he clarifies what he meant by literature back then: "Without seeking to justify myself too much, I would nevertheless say that I was certainly thinking of literary works but that I was more concerned with communicating their force and form to everyone than [with] the work of

⁸² Blanchot, Maurice. "The Last to Speak." *Voices from Elsewhere*. State University of New York, 2007.

the writer....” (97).⁸³ Therefore, “the political” and “literature” refer to unworking relationships set up by writing, by the limits and possibilities of sending and reception, rather than to the meaning that a literary work creates and transmits or to the production of something held in common. In what follows, I hope to show that Nancy *is* speaking about literature, and that Celan’s poetics is concerned with being-in-common.

4.2.1. *PARTAGE* AND RESONANCE

Philosophical studies on Celan usually acknowledge, albeit briefly, the similarities between Celan’s poetry and Nancy’s reflections on community. I interpret these references as an indication that something in Nancy’s project must be compatible with literature and that something in Celan’s poetics must be compatible with Nancy’s political ontology, or at least with the relationship he develops in this text between an inoperative community and ontology. Important concepts and questions from *The Inoperative Community* underlie these approaches. The concept of worklessness (*désœuvrement*), of course, but in connection to *partage* or being-with (the idea that being is primordially in common) and communication, when the term is understood as a movement of address that exposes limits—which is to say, in the light of Nancy’s dialogue with Bataille. However, these approaches don’t address Nancy’s concern with the literary directly.

Derrida and Christopher Fynsk are two writers who refer directly to Nancy and who seem to have in mind his discussion with Blanchot on community when writing about Celan. Derrida describes the structure of Celan’s dates with help from Nancy’s vocabulary: “I will thus use, as does Jean-Luc Nancy (...), this word, *partage* (partition, partaking), which in French names difference, the line of demarcation or the parting of waters, scission, caesura, as well as participation, that which is divided because it is shared or held in common, imparted and partaken of” (“Shibboleth” 31). *Partage* means a gathering and a divide that accurately describes the structure of address in Celan’s poems. They call the other to come but also tear asunder due to the singularity that is

⁸³ Here he also alludes to one reason he doesn’t feel quite comfortable with literature: the idea of the *work*. For Nancy it isn’t easy to understand how the *work* of literature and inoperativity can cohabit. He can’t come to terms with the idea that inoperativity has to come out of a work, which is why his focus on ontology and being-in-common is so strong and differs, as I have discussed in chapter one, with Bataille’s and Blanchot’s position, who think that negativity is unleashed by the work itself.

exposed when the other tries to read the poem. Readers take their share but also crash against the unreadable.

Further along the essay, Derrida turns to the problem of community, as Celan's poetry calls for. He writes that the "circumscribed word"⁸⁴ grants access to the community—not through "a common essence"—but through the event of a circumscribed writing, which "must take place once, precisely, each time one time..." (62-63). These statements stand close to what the Nancy-Blanchot debate on community brought to light: the need to consider an alternative to grounding community on a common essence: "What is communicated is not a common substance but the very fact of being in relation, the 'contagion' which is another name for communication, through which nothing is transmitted other than precisely the fact that there is transmission, passages and sharing" (*The Disavowed Community* 9). This passage is representative of Nancy's project, in which communication is "a sharing [and divide] that becomes subject" (*Listening* 41).

As we saw in chapter one, Nancy's idea of existence as relation or contagion is indebted to Bataille, but also to Heidegger. In *The Inoperative Community* he makes the case that Heidegger fell short of radically implicating *Dasein's* being-toward-death in its being-with. In *The Disavowed Community* (2016) he reaffirms what he'd already established then:

Heidegger's *Mitsein*, and even his *Mit-da-sein*, is not thought out as radically or as decisively as it should be. It would really need to be understood that the "mit" does not modify the "sein" (as if being could already sustain itself in some way, as if being were itself; that is, as if being were or existed absolutely); and it would need to be understood that the "mit" does not even qualify the "Dasein," but that it constitutes it essentially. (2)

I'm recalling this because Fynsk asserts that Celan pushes Heidegger's thought on "finitude to the point of recognizing that the difference"⁸⁵ can only be thought as occurring or opening *in relation, in always singular relations* (...). The difference, then, is to be understood in the manner of what Jean-Luc Nancy refers to as *partage*" (173). His argument points out that Celan develops the same problem as Nancy and ends up in a

⁸⁴ With the expression "circumscribed word" Derrida is displacing toward writing the "semantic network" of *circumcision*, which "designates an operation, the surgical act of cutting, but also (...) the condition of being circumcised" ("Shibboleth" 55), which is an event of legitimate entry into a community (58). "If all poets are Jews, they are all, the poets, circumcised or circumcisers. This opens up, in Celan's text, a tropic of circumcision that turns from ciphered sores toward reading-wounds" (55).

⁸⁵ "The difference is the 'same' out of which beings emerge in their difference—over against one another, as Heidegger puts it, *gegeneinanderüber* (...). But Celan underscores the radical temporal character of this difference..." (Fynsk, "The Realities at Stake" 173).

very similar place: a poetics of difference. We thus begin to see that Celan breaks the boundaries between philosophy and poetics by taking Heidegger's ontology a step further, and that he and Nancy carry out a similar task through different forms of writing.

Celan's account of the vocal cords is representative of his poetics and of the relations that each poem makes possible. The fourth stanza of "Slate-eyed one," analyzed in the previous chapter, opens an ontological reflection on "communication." It suggests that being is in common because address exists even before the act of speech: "With you, / on the vocal cords' bridge, in the /great Inbetween, / nightover" (*BIT* 97-99). Here the addressed "you" is not on the other side, the outside, where the words would head toward, rather "you" is already part of the very possibility of address, represented by the vocal cords which would in turn represent an "inner outside." It is transgressive to think of a body part as both proper and foreign. Celan shows us that this part of our bodies is meant for sending, listening, and aims at exposure. This is very similar to Nancy's understanding of the *clinamen*, which he defines as an inclination of the self to the outside, to what it's not; it is the edge, he says, that opens being-in-common.⁸⁶ In *The Meridian*, Celan stresses something very similar: "the poem as the poem of one who speaks under the angle of inclination of his Being" (55). An angle that even precedes and makes possible the act of speech. By locating the other at the vocal cords, Celan breaks the link between singularity and self-sameness; by locating the other at a personal and singular body part the idea of the self is fissured.

His reflections on sound, vibration and address coincide with Nancy's reflection on sound and listening, and are thus useful to articulate their positions. As we saw, Celan's poetry develops Mandelstam's understanding of language as an existential resonance in which address and reception paradoxically overlap. In *Listening*, Nancy argues that to sound "is not only, for the sonorous body, to emit a sound, but it is also to stretch out, to carry itself and be resolved into vibrations that both return it to itself and place it outside itself" (8). He wants to highlight that sound is both exterior and singular; an accurate manifestation of a way of being in-between the inner and the outer. For Celan, the poetic subject stretches out by means of address and returns—"a homecoming"—to an already fissured self. Hamacher explores this "projection" in "The Second Inversion: Movements of a figure through Celan's Poetry:"

⁸⁶ See chapter one, page 28.

Celan's texts (...) part ways with subjectivity by articulating the structure of self-relation and self-reference as that of a linguistic act which, once dissolved from the self and the logic of its positing, attains an altered relation to itself in the very movement of dissolution. Language is not posited but projected (...), a boomerang, a projectile with the ability to turn on itself and return to its place of departure if it is thrown the right way. (249)

The passage gives us clues about how Celan throws the linguistic boomerang "the right way" in order to create an altered relation with the self. It has to do with the "movement of dissolution" that drives the poetic event, and the subjects revolving around it, to incompleteness. Celan speaks of this movement in terms of the poem "starting a route into nothingness," or when he affirms that the absolute poem cannot exist. Giving centrality to address and to the exposure of finite temporalities also helps produce the dissolution of meaning.

Nancy distinguishes listening and hearing by arguing that the former resists meaning whereas hearing refers to what we understand when we perceive sounds. He explains that sound (i.e. timbre) is a form of withdrawal of what we hear. In a sense, sound is how speech grows silent: "'(s)ilence' in fact must here be understood (...) not as a privation but as an arrangement of resonance" (*Listening* 21); hence, "to be listening is always to be on the edge of meaning" (7). In the Mandelstam radios essay, Celan writes: "It is this tension of the times, between its own and the foreign, which lends that pained-mute *vibrato* to a Mandelstam poem by which we recognize it. (...) Things come together, yet even in this togetherness the question of their wherefrom and whereto *resounds*" (my italics, *MDM* 216). He is not presenting muteness as a privation but as a physical vibrato that resists and withdraws the logical sense that words attempt to make. Consequently, the poem cannot be completely understood because the singularity of Mandelstam's pain stands in the way. It interrupts the representational and signifying functions of language, affirming singularity as it separates the poem –and the reader– from the poem itself. "Togetherness" resounds with the "question of the wherefrom and whereto" because each poetic (mis)encounter involves a simultaneous sharing and divide. What Nancy calls "resonance" involves this doubling of sound.

A vibrato is singular yet always exposed, headed towards, sent. In *The Meridian* drafts, Celan jotted down two fragmentary notes that support this. First: "The falling silent of language → = direction, oppositeness—something else than the atomization,

the search for words, word parts, particles...” (120). Second: “Voice-direction. Timbre” (271). In the first note, an arrow, a symbol for direction, illustrates the falling silent of language, which is the same sense that “timbre” is given in the second fragment. Thus, for Celan too, language falling into silence means that it is at the edge of itself and not self-enclosed. Poetic projection (address and exposure) defeats the atomization of poems and individuals.⁸⁷ The connection between writing, worklessness and community thus boils down to the “question of going back to, or opening oneself up to, the resonance of being, or to being as resonance” (*Listening*, Nancy 21).

Nancy and Celan understand being and writing as communication and the limit of communication. Since these limits aren’t exposed in everyday talk, where language is used as a means of transaction and information, literature becomes a significant site. For this reason, Nancy declares that “we must not stop writing, or letting the singular outline of our being-in-common expose itself” (41). Similarly, for Celan, in principle, “writing as way-of-being leads in the final analysis no longer to see a difference in principle between poem and handshake” (*MDM* 134). In a handshake two people are brought together, but at the same time they remain separated by the boundaries of their bodies. The contour of each hand is underlined through touch: “...to reach one another, to touch one another, is to touch the limit where being itself, where being in common conceals us one from the other, and, in concealing us, in withdrawing us from the other before the other, exposes us to him or her” (Nancy, *TIC* 66).

By providing a close reading of Celan’s poem, “Line the wordcaves,” I aim to substantiate the claim that he is a poet of community and that Nancy’s reflection in *The Inoperative Community* is germane to literature. It belongs to *Fadensonnen* (*Threadsuns* 1968), a collection in which many of the ideas sketched in *The Meridian* are fully developed. This is one of Celan’s most difficult metapoems, so viewing it in the light of community is definitely a challenge. To my benefit, Pierre Joris and Werner Hamacher provide close readings of it, which I will therefore build on. Hamacher believes that in this poem Celan “gave the poetic recipe for the preparation and reading of his texts, and not just his own” (259). Since the unworking communities in discussion rely on a radicalization of poetic address, or on the pure movement—and its limits—of writing-for and reading, this poem is highly significant.

⁸⁷ In later poems Celan literally uses the arrow as a figure of the addressee: “...arrowy one [Pfeilige], when you whirl toward me, / I know from where, / I forget from where” (*BIT* 434).

LINE THE WORDCAVES

with panther skins,

widen them, hide-to and hide-fro,

sense-hither and sense thither,

give them courtyards, chambers, drop doors

and wildnesses, parietal,

and listen for their second

and each time second and second

tone.

(*BIT* xlviii)⁸⁸

In the first two lines the speaker gives the addressee an instruction. Joris identifies the addressee with the poet since the instruction is about the prime material of his or her work, the word. I disagree with this hypothesis because I have been arguing that for Celan writing is not a work, and words are neither materials nor parts of any kind of mechanism that the writer produces something with. I would agree if he had said that the poem addresses the poet as reader, turning writing as reading into the subject of the poem, which the poem's last lines support by describing writing as a very special kind of listening. I'll get there later. In the first lines, however, the poem addresses an unidentified "you" and is sent on its lonely route to someone who might find it. At this particular, singular moment, this other happens to be me. It's addressing me. But it's not about me: the subject is poems.

The image of the cave presents words as hollow entities that must be lined with panther skin. The first time I read this I thought: "they are emptied of content, signifiers lacking the signified, so they should be lined with meaning." The twist is that they're going to be lined with something absolutely exterior too: skins. In this regard, Joris says the poem is "suggesting that something usually considered as an external covering is brought inside and turned inside out (...), inside and outside become indeterminable and interchangeable" (xlix). Similarly, Hamacher writes: "Aside from the duplicity of the word *anskleiden*, which in isolation can mean both 'dress' and 'undress,' the outside—the

⁸⁸ KLEIDE DIE WORTHÖHLEN AUS / mit Pantherhäuten, // erweiter sie, fellhin und fellher, / sinnhin und sinnher, // gib ihnen Vorhöfe, Kammern, Klappen / und Wildnisse, parietal, // und lausch ihrem zweiten / und jeweils zweiten und zweiten / Ton (*PC* 299).

skin, the pelt—is displaced as sense into the inscape of the word; sense is only one—and indeed an alien, second—skin, an inner mask” (260). This inversion is highly relevant due to what both writers point out: the boundaries and hierarchies between the inner and the outer are shattered, and because a different type of sense arises, one which has more to do with exposition than meaning, and more with what is foreign than with what is proper. This is the key of the poem. What’s at stake is the exposure of the skins of language: sound, silence, vibratos; the beats of a temporal existence that are projected from the fissured vocal cords. Duplicity and exteriority.

If we take into account that these two lines also set up a prehistoric scenery by the nearness of the words “cave” and “panther”—by means of imagery and poetic evocation we associate this with a primitive, prehistoric cave—we could articulate this scenery with the idea that the inversion is primordial, just as being in common is primordial for both Nancy and the poet. An analogy can be drawn between the wordcaves lined with panther skins and the exposed subject of community: “The origin of community is the tracing of the borders upon which or along which singular beings are exposed. We are alike because each of us is exposed to the outside that we are for ourselves” (Nancy, *TIC* 33). This is precisely why Celan’s poetic events are relevant for a reflection on inoperative communities: they expose being to a primordial outside.

For Joris, the next two lines suggest that the skins are *between* something, because they can move to and fro, hither and thither. He also adds that the chosen animal’s name, *panther*, hides a word game: in French, *entre* and *antre* mean “between” and “den” respectively (xlix). “Between” is an important and recurrent word for Nancy’s political-literary ontology, because it alludes to the limit that separates singularities at the same time as it alludes to the exposition of one to the other, the “vocal’s cord bridge” continuously reaching out (out, in that particular example, as an *inscription* of the body). In this sense, Nancy says that when a work of literature is “offered up to communication it does not pass into a common space (...): only the limit is common and the limit is not a place, but the sharing of places, their spacing. There is no common place” (*TIC* 73). This is also the space Celan’s poems require so they can happen without ever arriving. As Hamacher writes about Celan’s boomerang: “only so long and as long as it does not arrive, does it come home. Its homecoming and return are this: not arriving. Being, being-oneself and being-with-one-another is a coming without arrival” (253).

But Joris interprets this in-between as the description of an indeterminate process in which words are worked and transformed to be meaningful, and in which multiperspectival layers of meaning are created (xlix). This approach is inconsistent with the poem as a whole, which is concerned with exposure and withdrawal rather than with the production and mediation of meanings. But it is coherent with Joris's reading of the poem from the start, since he tries to argue that the poem is about the operations of a writer. Rather than being concerned with the connection between exteriority, otherness and address that stands out in the poem, Joris engages with what he calls Celan's "constructive activism" (li). Hamacher's translation of these two lines is closer to my own reading: "expand them / infur and outfur / toward sense and away from sense..." (259). From the perspective of inoperative poetics, Hamacher's version describes a way of reading and writing that widens the in-between space and contributes to shake the boundaries between the inner and the outer, through which meaning and self-relations (of subjects, poems and language with themselves) are cut across by incompleteness and address—or the movement of *heading toward* something and not arriving.

This movement is described further in the third stanza, which introduces "physiological terminology, linking the wordcaves to the hollow organ that is the heart" (Joris l). At this point, the poem reveals itself to be a love poem. First, because of the symbolic resonance of the figure of the heart; but also, and more importantly, because this is the section that describes the passage to the other, the affectionate movement of address. Perhaps this is the best way to think about the inoperative community that Nancy is concerned with and the type of writing and reading that Celan hopes for: passages of the heart, communication as a movement that, whilst free to roam from the courtyards to the chambers, has to be attentive of the limit, the drop doors which are a sign of the untamable wildnesses of otherness. While we ordinarily attempt to overcome the distance and differences separating us from others by recognition or appropriation, something unconquerable shows itself when poems bring singularity and finitude to the fore. The exposure to this limit, the skin, is the sharing and divide that "becomes subject" in the unworking community.

When Joris introduces the last stanza, he writes: "But it's not just a question of simply adding and enlarging, of a mere constructive activism; the poet also has to listen" (li). Finally, he acknowledges what Celan calls "the congenital darkness of the poem," in which *poiesis*, as creation, is displaced by the overlap of address and reception. Moving

away from the “constructive activism” perspective, Joris provides an illuminating comparison between the “second tone” and the heart tones—specifically, the diastole movement. Like a breathturn, the diastole is a moment of interval in which the heart relaxes between contractions. It’s an in-between, like the panther skins lining the wordcaves. Even though he doesn’t develop it in depth, Joris also highlights the poem’s reference to the physicality of sound: “The triple repetition on the need to listen to the second tone thus insists that the sound produced by the diastole is what interests the poet” (li). The relevance of this idea is that it starts to point to a *secondary* sound, which frees language from its signification and referential functions. Hence, the secondary tone’s “mute-vibrato” interrupts the primary tone.

According to Hamacher, Celan shows us that “the language of finitude is the chronic retreat of the referential and semantic functions of language, because with each one of its words (...) the things thus spoken are brought to the point of disappearance” (32). He develops this by reflecting on “the second tone” in connection with another poem in which Celan writes that “the second buzzes” (“*sirrt die Sekunde*”). Hamacher argues that “this word, *die Sekunde*, is itself cut and read as *diese Kunde* (this message, this conduit of information)” (236). By saying that it buzzes, he believes that Celan makes the point that the second does not have a message to impart, that it’s self-interrupting and asserts nothing but its own secession from itself (237). Thus, he writes that the second “‘buzzes’—in the musicological sense of interval, an interval between different meanings, an interval between different languages, an interval itself that first gives the speaking of language space and time. Whatever steps into it, into this interval, this speaking, becomes other than it is” (236-237). This interval is similar to the one involved in the heart’s diastole movement that Joris signals. But Hamacher’s position relates the question of the tone (the buzz) to temporality and the other.

We saw earlier that, for Celan, the exposure of time —the time of the other— in poetic address confronts readers with finitude, which has a structure of *partage*, which simultaneously opens beings to what they share and what separates them. We also saw that this is *heard* in mortal language, which Celan at times calls timbre and vibrato, and which Heidegger designates as the finite peel of stillness. But for Celan, following Buber and developing Heidegger’s thought, this peel can *only* be heard in the —linguistic— I-Thou encounter, which is why it needs to be exposed through poetic address, an address that “lines the word cave,” making the outside constitutive of the inside and turning

poetry, in order to exist, into a site of (mis)encounter. In “Line the wordcaves” Celan doesn’t relate this sound to “*Sekunde*,” but “*zweiten*,” as in secondary. This makes the poem focus less on temporality and more strictly on the tone itself, on sound and exposure, which lead to the idea of the other, as the second participant and the second tone —the one who listens and what is listened to. In this way, it announces it is a site of “resonance;” the lining that exposes us to one another and to the outside that makes us (and the poem) incomplete

4.2.2. THE INOPERATIVE COMMUNITY

Unknowingly, Celan abides by many of the characteristics of an inoperative community when, giving temporality and address the center stage, he renounces the absolute poem and the complete transmission of meaning, and steps away from the idea of writing as creating or producing. His resistance to these poetic legacies turns his poems into sites of compearance where otherness and the finitude of each “I” are exposed. Celan wasn’t concerned with developing a philosophical project or an aesthetic or literary theory. He reacted to Nazism and to the murder and persecution of a community he belonged to. I mentioned earlier that he described this period as one in which language had to pass “through a frightful muting, pass through the thousand darknesses of death bringing speech” (Celan, *SPP* 395) This is what his poetry responds to. His concern, as mentioned in different texts, is with the human,⁸⁹ whose singularity arises in relation; in the dim light of otherness and finitude that poetic address casts. This is what Lucile bears witness to when she cries “Long live the king!” and interrupts the communal and totalizing sense that justified assassinating the enemies of the revolution in *Danton’s Death*.

But Celan’s poems aren’t exactly like Lucile’s cry; they don’t interrupt a myth with a powerful slogan. And neither do they interrupt a proclaimed political discourse that the poem would address. They interrupt our mythic (artistic) ways of existing as individuals in immanent communities.⁹⁰ On this basis, I claim Celan’s poetics responds

⁸⁹ “The human is however not, we have meanwhile experienced this copiously, the main characteristic of the humanists. The humanists are those who look beyond the concrete human being toward the noncommittal side of humanity” (*MDM*, Celan 130).

⁹⁰ As I explained in chapter one, for Nancy, an immanent community describes a totalizing and self-founding community where the plurality of existences is absorbed into the immanence of the Same. It has a mythical structure in so far as it is a founding fiction that uses discourse to produce and reproduce the narration of a communal destiny and origin.

more to a desire of community, in the sense of resonating and being-in-common, than to a project of philosophy or literature. Accordingly, his work questions our understanding of the acts of reading and writing and transforms how we do both. Nancy's explanation of how literature interrupts myth can help us to grasp what is at stake in Celan's poetics:

When myth stops playing, the community that resists completion and fusion, the community that propagates and exposes itself, makes itself heard in a certain way (...) the interruption itself has a singular voice, a voice or a retiring music that is taken up, held, and at the same time exposed in an echo that is not a repetition—it is the voice of community. (*TIC* 62)

Taking into account my earlier reflection on resonance, literature would be the vibrato that resonates as the logic that sustains a myth withdraws. It is what Nancy also calls the timbre of being-in-common. This coincides with Celan's understanding of poetry: by putting the vibrato to the fore and unleashing the withdrawal of meaning, a way of reading and relating to others, which could lead to completion and fusion, is also resisted. The renunciation of the absolute poem and of the complete transmission of meaning results in an inoperative way of reading and writing. That is, it results in an alternative and unworking mode of being in relation which privileges addressing the other over the content of what is said to him or her.

For Celan, the absolute poem doesn't exist mainly for two reasons that I have already developed: in the first place, because poems aren't finished products (or products at all), but singular, iterable events (in the Derridian sense in which every iteration alters the same). Unworking communities follow the same logic: they are fleeting, singular, moments of communication that can happen constantly, especially if we consider that even body parts, like the vocal cords, are a constant source of exposition, resonance, and caesura. In the second place, there is no absolute poem because every act of reading is never fully executed, no poem can fully be read, understood and appropriated; each poem is, metaphorically, a handshake because the act of reading brings out the contours, the limits of singularity that only the encounter underlines. So it's precisely in this sense that reading is rendered inoperative, and that the possibility of completely understanding pertains to the realm of myth.

This brings me to Celan's resistance to *poiesis* as creation by way of the idea that poems only *happen* through a "desperate dialogue" which awakens temporary and

existential correspondences. Earlier I stressed this Neoplatonic formulation made by Celan: “In the gaze of the onlooker the gazed at awakes – but it does not awake to eternal life” (*MDM* 136). It supports the idea that poems don’t have a common essence on account of which it would be possible to found a community of writers and readers or to reproduce a particular myth. Rather, each poem awaits and comes to life in the light, under the lamp, of somebody else, and each relation creates a new and different “tension of the times.” If Pushkin, Catullus and Ovid have not been born yet, as Mandelstam states, then they will be born each time they are read, and resonate differently whenever and wherever that occurs (each poem, as Celan kindly wrote down for us, opens up the question of the wherefrom and whereto). In *The Inoperative Community* Nancy writes:

...community communicates itself through the repetition and the contagion of births: each birth exposes another singularity, a supplementary limit, and therefore another communication. This is not the opposite of death, for the death of this singular being who has just been born is also inscribed and communicated by its limit. (61)

In this quotation Nancy most certainly addresses literature and what’s at stake in Celan’s poems: that each birth is inseparable from finitude refers to the difference that the other exposes and encounters in each (literary) event. Celan’s commitment to each poem as an “eyeevent” values difference over sameness and seeks to preserve the singularity of pain and finitude that determines his use of poetic address.

The “secondary tone” is common to Nancy and Celan’s understanding of literature and community. The specificity of both their ontological and literary reflections on sound, address and being-in-common is that the only way to encounter the primordial otherness of beings is through a type of communication that privileges the very movement of sending over the construction and transmission of a message. Nancy and Celan think of being and writing at the limits of communication. This is why Nancy approaches the question of literature: because literary language can exceed the realms of meaning and representation; and Celan’s poetry develops a poetics of address and reception that questions recognition, appropriation and readability in the name of being-in-common. Perhaps the experience of the illegible is what makes it confusing for some scholars to understand why Nancy is calling literature something that puts a limit to representation and communication, but my aim is exactly this: to show that literature

unworks itself in the name of the other through poetic address, which, in Celan's case, is also a form of listening.

4.3. THE TRANSLATIONS

One of Celan's closest friends, the poet Nelly Sachs, was born on the same day as Dickinson, sixty-one years later. On the occasion of Sach's "seventieth birthday on 10 December 1961, Celan sent her an offprint, his 'translations from Emily Dickinson, born on 10 December 1830,' and he wrote out for her in English Dickinson's quatrain (slightly adjusted): 'who dwelled in Possibility / a fairer house than Prose / More numerous of windows / Superior of doors' " (Felstiner, "Introduction" xi). The offprint consisted of his translations of eight poems that were published in *Die Neue Rundschau* that same year under the title "*Acht Gedichte*," "without the original English text and without naming the sources" (Rosenthal 134).

Between 1959 and 1963, Celan translated and published ten poems by Dickinson.⁹¹ This period includes the publication of his collection *Sprachgitter* (1959), the process of writing and delivering *The Meridian* (1961) and the publication of *Die Niemandrose* (1963). As explained earlier, these years mark a significant turning point in his work. This is when he starts to seek a way of writing that won't lead to the appropriation, recognition and reconciliation of meaning, and when he develops further the ontological and unworking dimensions of address and reception that were latent in earlier works. During this period, Celan starts to think of writing as a way of reading and listening—and listening as a finite and temporal possibility marked by difference. The fact that Celan was an active translator throughout his lifetime also influenced his understanding of poetic reception,⁹² which is clearly the outcome of his Mandelstam

⁹¹ In 1959 "Because I could not stop for Death" appeared in *Almanach S. Fischer* 73. In 1961 *Die Neue Rundschau* published the following eight poems under the title "*Acht Gedichte*:" "My life closed twice," "To my quick ears," "One blessing had I," "Father, I bring thee," "I never saw a moor," "I reason, earth is short," "Let down the bars, o death," "Four Trees;" "At Half past Three" was published in *Insel Almanach* in 1963.

⁹² "Translations took up much of the 1950's for Celan, and again in the 1960's. Many were paid jobs, others for his own interests, sometimes for both love and money. He translated over forty poets, plus Alain Resnais's *Night and Fog* (...) During nineteen months of forced labor, he wrote poems regularly while also translating Shakespeare sonnets, Verlaine, Yeats, Housman, Eluard, Ésenin, and others. From then on his favored English-language poets were Shakespeare and Dickinson" (Felstiner, "Celan Translating Others" web). He only translated two women poets: Dickinson and Marianne Moore. The other English language poets he translated were: Frost, Donne, Marvell, Housman and Lewis Carroll (Rosenthal 134).

translations. In an interview, Celan once commented that he translated for pleasure and because it helped him become more intimate with his own language (MKR 141).⁹³

Celan's translations of Dickinson are a unique opportunity to see how the relationships between the unworking and literary address take place in this encounter. In other words, the structures of address, epistolary drives, and the way poems are unworked in the two cases –which I have coupled Dickinson-Blanchot and Celan-Nancy– meet in each of these poetic events. They allow us to see how Celan himself relates to the questions of reception and difference; how, in Nancy's terms, his singular site faces Dickinson's—whose poems, since the start, were meant to be received in a movement of loss that doesn't allow them to arrive whole or be received completely. In fact, incompleteness is something that her work shares with the practice of translation.

The practice and theory of translation question the possibility of reception itself: an absolute translation is impossible due to the temporal and historical, spatial and geographical distances between the original and the translation, as well as the unbridgeable cultural and semantic gaps between languages (what Benjamin calls modes of signification). Kerstin Behnke has this in mind when she affirms that the “difficulty that every translation encounters is the difference – the difference and differences in the literary tradition, the language, and the culture between any two linguistic communities” (411). Consequently, any attempt to translate always adds something to the original: the epistolary structure that orbits on loss, which Dickinson's work carries out masterfully. The translator seems to turn the original author into a “master of the post” who “[k]now[s] well how to play with *the poste restante*. Know[s] how not to be there and how to be strong for not being there right away. Know[s] how not to deliver on command, how to wait and make wait” (Derrida, *The Post Card* 191). In other words, the event of translation makes manifest the original's resistance to the very possibility of reading and reception by stressing its principle of deferral and acknowledging the epistolary drives of non-arrival.⁹⁴ This is one of the reasons that have led me to relate translation to the reflection on unworking communities and poetic address.

⁹³ In this respect Alex Gellhaus remarks that “the fact that Celan often arranged for his own texts to be printed in magazines with parallel translations and included both areas of his creative work in readings, suggests that translation is inseparably linked with the nature of his own poetry and appears together with it in his biography” (9).

⁹⁴ In contrast to what the Athenaeum Romantics believed, from this position translation does not potentiate the original work's essence but unworks it. Antoine Berman's study of criticism and translation in German Romanticism develops a reflection on translation in the light of the concepts of potentiation (Novalis) and *Bildung* (Goethe, Schlegel). In the first case translation makes stronger and truer the original's

The subject of translation relates to the problem of community on many levels. It can contribute to a reflection on operative, immanent communities because it involves the transposition of a text from one linguistic community to another. In this respect Behnke recalls that “[c]ontemporary discussions of cultural difference, alterity and otherness have bestowed a new emphasis on the idea and practice of translation as it brings different languages and cultures into contact and thus defines a particular mode of cross-cultural relations” (408).⁹⁵ However, it also relates to the question of unworking communities, because no matter the approach, impossibility and difference are constantly *unworking* the absolute translation, suspending its realization. And incompleteness not only affects the translation, but the original itself. This is the relationship I am interested in exploring: the incompleteness of both the translated and the original texts: the linguistic “communication” of losses. I have discussed incompleteness and the opening of the illegible in regard to the structures of address in the poems of Dickinson and Celan. In spite of their differences, they both write in a way that thwarts reception; Dickinson’s “oeuvre” is paradoxically consigned to loss and Celan’s to the exposure of finitude that demarcates difference in each poetic event.

In order to understand how unworking relationships take place in their work, I’ve addressed some ways in which their poems use different strategies to *keep quiet* and remain incomplete. When we listen to Celan’s second tone, we hear a singular vibrato of pain in connection to the Shoah, which is traversed, performatively, by the way each poem functions as a date that can represent the same day for two people but remits to different experiences and makes them resonate against each other. The bars of language are cast down through a falling silent or withdrawal of sense that readers cannot experience or recognize. The “essential darkness” of a Celan poem makes us aware of singularity and otherness through the encounter of finite temporalities. This difference

essence, actualizing it; and, in the second, translation is a question of the appropriation of a foreign culture. Rather than admit to a lack, both positions tend toward the absolute. To go further into this discussion see: Berman, Antoine. *The Experience of the Foreign*. State University of New York Press, 1992.

⁹⁵ From this perspective, Schleiermacher, who stresses the “historic goal of translation” (54), poses a very interesting question that many theorists will later address too: “Either the translator leaves the writer alone as much as possible and moves the reader toward the writer, or he leaves the reader alone as much as possible and moves the writer towards the reader” (42). Ultimately, he will argue that translation is only valuable in the first case, because “readers (...) must comprehend the spirit of the language that was native to the writer, and they must be able to see his peculiar way of thinking and feeling” (39). Spivak and Berman provide lucid reflections on the relationship between translation, difference, and cross-cultural relations; see: “The Politics of Translation” and “Translation and the Trials of the Foreign,” respectively, in *The Translations Studies Reader*, edited by Lawrence Venuti. Routledge, 2000.

makes the binary experience of self and other —as inner and outer— fall apart. For Dickinson, saying nothing or keeping quiet is a way in which work gets undone in her poems. She unleashes worklessness through the material surfaces of the poems, linguistic omissions and the disappearance of the subjects involved in the poem's fabrication, narration and reception. Her silences react to an economy and to the economic-centered relations that she was bound to in 19th century New England and which she challenged by creating a surprisingly modern, useless and vacant intimacy with the addressees of her poems. Her silences address others and create relations through squander, in which even the subjects waste away. The effective transmission of a message and the completion of the work are thwarted in both cases.

One of the main characteristics that Blanchot and Nancy ascribe to negative communities is what they call, following Bataille, a principle of incompleteness or insufficiency. It first appeared in Bataille's essay "Labyrinth," from the 1930's. Here he described insufficiency as "a principle that dominates all existence," which implies that

...no being is ever complete, ever sufficient, and that because of this insufficiency every being is in an open relation to others. (...) The most powerful example of the principle of insufficiency is language because language imposes itself on us in relation to others. To be in language is to be in relation to others, a relation that can never be fully mastered or controlled. (Noys 14)

The principle of insufficiency suspends the myth of the autonomous monadic individual and opens up being to communication and exposure. This explains why Blanchot and Nancy would be attracted to this principle: they were searching for an alternative to community *as work* in the crossroads of language, literature, politics, ethics and ontology, and all these realms are touched by Bataille in this reflection. In "Around the Notion of Literary Communism," Nancy clarified that he attempted to oppose "community as the projection of completion" and therefore "community *as work*" with the "concept of an 'inoperative' or 'unworking' community, that is, community as essentially incomplete" (26).

It is important to emphasize that translation and unworking communities share a strong principle at their core: insufficiency. And they raise a similar question: how to think about the common and the limits of the common—after all, the difficulty of translation begins with what languages don't have in common. In "The Misery and the Splendor of Translation," Ortega y Gasset differentiates two types of translators: good

and bad utopians. Bad utopians think that because translation “is *desirable*, it is possible (...). The good utopian thinks that because it would be desirable to free men from the divisions imposed by language, there is little probability that it can be attained; therefore it can only be achieved to an approximate measure” (98). The good translator is therefore one who admits difference, failure, the principle of insufficiency.

Ortega y Gasset grounds this irreconcilable distance on what languages don’t have in common. But his theory of translation still believes in the original as a sufficient whole. Even the way he thinks about silence is in the service of the work’s effectivity: the “effectiveness of speech does not simply lie in speaking, in making statements, but, at the same time and of necessity, in a relinquishing of speech, a keeping quiet, a being silent” (103). In this passage he is trying to address a difficulty of translation: that speech is not *completed* by what is said but also by what is kept quiet; his question can thus be put like this: if the effectiveness of speech is the very withdrawal of speech, how can a person translate the falling silent of another person’s poem or text effectively? The problem is that his understanding of silence is operative; it is part of an effective whole: “A person incapable of quieting many things would not be capable of talking. And each language is a different equation of statements and silences” (104). Rather than attempting to turn silence into part of the whole, Blanchot writes that one has to talk in order to remain silent (*TUC* 56); in order to unleash the unworking duplicity of language, its withdrawal. The question of unworking writing, translation and community is not concerned with effectivity: “insufficiency cannot be derived from a model of sufficiency. It is not looking for what may put an end to it...” (8). Accordingly, translation is not only impossible because the translator can’t complete the translation, but because the original isn’t complete either.

I will now look at Celan’s Dickinson translations and examine how the principle of insufficiency takes shape in his translations of her poems; how a poet who understands poetry as a relation of *partage* read a poet whose writing unleashes relationships of loss and lack. I am asking these translations the same question Nancy and Blanchot’s discussion revolves around: what is the common? What are its limits? Are the limits common? Work on these translations is scarce and there is no published record of Celan mentioning them except in the letter to Nelly Sachs. The few scholars who deal exclusively with these translations approach them on the basis of the thematic

similarities between Celan's *oeuvre* and the Dickinson poems he translated, since the latter are more or less thematically homogenous.

For Shira Wolosky, "all ten of his translations engage metaphysical concerns. They confront death. They pose questions of order, meaning, direction, purpose, teleology, theodicy, redemption" ("Apophatics" 64). Similarly, Felstiner characterizes Celan as sharing Dickinson's "solitary, baffled, spiritual yearning and her sense that death dwells close and poems speak truth, if anything can" ("Celan Translating Others" Web). Marc Wortman says that the Dickinson translations Celan published "voice metaphysical and spiritual concerns in human experience" (131). Rosenthal speculates "that Celan, despite large differences, was attracted to Dickinson by her themes of time and death as well as by her tone of skepticism and sarcasm, which he intensified to the extreme and thus transformed the poetry into something exceedingly modern" (134).⁹⁶ However, Rosenthal doesn't dwell on how exceedingly modern Dickinson's poetry already was; as Wolosky argues, "the fragmenting of language and the figure of silence," in the work of both poets, "point not to a transcending reality but rather to a crisis of relationship to it" ("Apophatics" 80). For Wolosky, their poems have in common a "theo-linguistic ground" in which a dislocated use of language traversed by silence represents a crisis in relation to a divine transcendence that is complexly and simultaneously desired and rejected (in Celan's case, resented).

Equally assertive, yet more original, is Benjamin Friedlander's example of a structural affinity between the poets. He says that Dickinson's "privileging of interpersonal communication over publication (evident in her refusal to publish poems willingly shared in correspondence) concretely enacts Celan's (...) abstract suggestion that the poem, 'essentially dialogue, may be a letter in a bottle thrown out to sea'" (180). Hopefully I have shown that this is more than an abstract suggestion, that it is the key to Celan's notion of address in regard to sending and in regard to a complex poetics of reception in which the concept of dialogue is not symmetrical. So even though Friedlander doesn't develop this point, it is accurate, especially if we take into account that many of the poems Dickinson kept to herself are marked by an epistolary structure of address.

Whilst scholars mostly trace the relationship between both poets on the basis of the poems' themes, Friedlander suggests a relation that has to do with the questions of

⁹⁶ With the term "spiritual" these authors are referring to Dickinson's paradoxical stance toward divine transcendence: she was skeptical and at the same time tormented by her own skepticism.

the post (address and reception) and publication, two questions which are at the heart of Dickinson's metaliterary reflections, and a problem every Dickinson scholar today has to consider. The 1959 Anchor edition of Dickinson's poems owned by Celan when he translated these poems includes letters too, so there is reason to believe that he was aware of the way she broke down the barriers between both genres.⁹⁷

But the fact is that the ten translations Celan chose to publish are closer to the more popular positions than to Friedlander's. Out of the ten, "only two, 'Father – I bring thee –, ' which demonstrates hints of a prayer, and 'Let down the Bars, Oh Death,' can be classified as a form of address" (Rosenthal 137). So even though poetic address was a main concern for Celan it might not have motivated these translations. Maybe he selected these because they raised issues that he identified with and which, back in 1959, played a role in determining the direction of his poetry, influenced by different factors that many of these scholars point out. However, instead of speculating on what attracted Celan to Dickinson's work, let's look at how he translated it.

Scholars who work on these translations generally start by referencing a theory of translation the poet was familiar with: Benjamin's "The Task of the Translator." This is the case of Peter Szondi's "The Poetry of Constancy: Paul Celan's Translation of Shakespeare's Sonnet 105," and Bianca Rosenthal's "Paul Celan's Translation of Emily Dickinson's 'Because I Could Not Stop for Death.'" Rosenthal states that "Celan, under the influence of Walter Benjamin, molds his translation into an attempted interpretation, which brings out the potential implications inherent in a text, set into his own language and stylistic elements, a process, however which also functions to change the original meaning" (134). Similarly, Szondi writes: "the movement from original to translation is a change in what Walter Benjamin, in his essay 'The Task of the Translator,' calls 'intention toward language' (...). Where a translation not only may, but should differ from the original in its mode of signification" (6). The main point is that the relationship between the original and the translation should not privilege fidelity but difference, because each language has fields and modes of signification that can't be translated word

⁹⁷ Later, "In the late 60's, when Celan was undergoing periods of psychic distress (...), he turned from a reading of Dickinson's poems to a reading of her letters. In his notebooks we find some literal translations of certain text passages, notes and poetic transformations of original quotations..." (Gellhaus and Kaiser 246).

for word.⁹⁸ In fact, also referencing Benjamin but in regard to the task of translating Celan's own poems, Wolosky writes:

In Celan, especially, the translation must necessarily miss. It must not strive to absorb Celan into the target language as though native to it. For, first, this would do violence to the strangeness and disruption of Celanian texts. To heal the linguistic wounds or seal the linguistic gaps by making the text an articulate and normative discourse in another language would be to betray Celan's project on many levels.

Celan's strangeness must itself be translated. This translated strangeness then serves a second function, to dramatize the distance, as also the relation, between the translation and the original text. ("On (Mis-)translating" 145-146)

Wolosky accurately acknowledges the proximity between Benjamin's theory of translation and the structural and linguistic gaps in Celan's poems. There is a similarity between the distance and the difference that, according to Benjamin's text, must be preserved in the translation of texts and in Celan's poetic project. The "strangeness" of Celan's own texts is similar to the principle of incompleteness that renders a translation impossible. In Celan this strangeness can be thought of as the original's resistance to become a *work* or an *absolute poem*. This is because every poem is twofold, always addressed and incomplete.⁹⁹

Accordingly, two main points can be made: first, that the practice of translation involves a tension between the sharing and divide that Nancy's use of the word "*partage*" accurately describes. In Celan's translation practice this is especially important in regard to "the paradoxical mandate for the translator to make the *time* of the original tangible in the translation and at the same time not to disregard the historical distance and the *time* of the translation" (Gellhaus and Kaiser 231). If we apply this concept to reading,

⁹⁸ In Benjamin's own terms: "The words *Brot* and *pain* 'intend' the same object, but the modes of this intention are not the same. It is owing to these modes that the word *Brot* means something different to a German than the word *pain* to a Frenchman, that these words are not interchangeable for them, that in fact they strive to exclude each other" (75).

⁹⁹ However there are other positions that deny this difference, running the risk of appropriating the singularity and filling the gaps between the original and the translation. This is how Tom Dolack interprets Celan's translating endeavors: "In translating Char (or any other of the many poets he translated) Celan is placing himself as that Other, as the man who picks up the message in a bottle that washes up on the sands of time. This act of reception and of completed dialogue is the necessary step before new poetry, new messages can be created and sent off into time" (69). The idea that fulfilled reception and completed dialogue lead to "new poetry" and "new messages" negates the unworking dimension of reading and writing that would guarantee the work's difference, its "doubling split," rather than being transformed by the reading subjects into something they could appropriate and recreate, reducing it to the logic of the same, which cancels out difference, and privileges signification and representation over relationality, address.

writing, and translating, we must understand that the illegible is both a part and a limit of each of these experiences. A note in which Celan speaks about his version of a line written in Russian by Yesenin considers these tensions:

This line by Yesenin, which, textually, means “I am the last poet of my village,” and which I have translated, “freely,” this is to say, obeying all my own laws –which are also those of my era and of the lived time — with: “No song to come after mine, to sing of the village.” This “village,” is it not, in my version, the village of Kafka’s “The Castle?” Communicating vessels – communicating across life, thanks to life. (Quoted in “Shared Poetic Space” 171)

Celan’s “own laws” are of two kinds: historical and personal—“my era, and the lived time” (a singular, finite, experience of history). This is why, for him, reading cannot be, as it is for Blanchot and Dickinson, a place where the subject ceases to experience itself as a subject. Quite the contrary, it’s a place where a subject appears as more and other than itself, due to language, which is understood as a communicating vessel that doesn’t transmit meaning but opens and connects existences. Celan’s exposure to Yesenin’s poems brings his singularity forth, a singularity that is open to the outside: to difference –Yesenin’s village. And to its “own laws:” his cultural and historical resonance with Kafka’s village. “Communication is the constitutive fact of an exposition to the outside that defines singularity” (Nancy, *TIC* 29).

Celan is suggesting that, for him, the word “village” remits to the same modes of signification as it would for Kafka, but not Yesenin. Kafka’s work and life bear witness to the prelude of the Holocaust from a Jewish point of view, Celan’s, to the aftermath. They speak of the same marginalized people and write in the same foreign language: German. Thus, in this passage Celan presents himself as “the good utopian” that Ortega y Gasset refers to: a translator who acknowledges the limits of translation. The use of the word “village” by Yesenin has different modes of signification in Russian, and in the first half of the 20th century in Russia when the poem was written, than those that the word has in German and in Germany after the Second World War (after the rise of the German Volk and the extermination of the Jewish people –different forms of “villages”). This is why Celan says the word situates him closer to Kafka than Yesenin. The singularity of Yesenin’s village exposes Celan to the singularity of his own time and language; the limit in translation he admits to when faced with Yesenin’s use of the word village opens something else up: his alliance with Kafka, the appearance of his own time

and cultural references. In this regard he commits to a comment on translation that he wrote to Werner Weber in 1960: “the poem, the translated poem, must, if it wants to be present in the second language once again, remember this being different and being something else, this being separated” (in Gellhaus and Kaiser 9).

Yesenin (1895-1925) was a Russian rural poet who moved to Moscow and St. Petersburg in order to have a successful literary career. In the cities he preserved a rural aesthetic: he dressed in traditional clothing and used a rural headscarf to wrap up his poems at recitals. He welcomed the Bolshevik Revolution, but as time passed he felt a tension between the harmony and naturalness of rural life and the Soviet industrialization of Russia, which he finally opposed.¹⁰⁰ This is the tension that the poem in question refers to; the fourth stanza is as follows: “On the blue field’s track / Soon an iron guest will appear. / Oats, poured with the dawn, / Will he reap, with a black hollow of a hand.” And the first stanza, which Celan mentions in the passage above, is a farewell to the rural life of the village: “I am the last poet of the village, / The plank bridge is modest in its songs. / I am standing for the farewell mass / Of the birch trees incensing with their foliage” (Web). Written in 1920, this poem represents a moment in which Yesenin was beginning to sense the dangerous paths Russia was taking with Soviet industrialization.

The difference between his line: “I am the last poet of my village” and Celan’s: “No song to come after mine, to sing to the village,” is that the latter is not about the poet but about the people that the absence of song will mourn. There is hopelessness in both poems. Yesenin’s speaks of a village that is going through a dangerous transformation, which has yet to come, in which the poet is still a central figure. Celan’s version knows what is ahead, has seen the devastation, and dares not make the poem about himself but about a lost community.

According to Celan’s comments on the Yesenin translation, we would expect Celan’s Dickinson translations to obey “all his laws” too. But scholars generally agree “he is more faithful here than in many other translations, he wishes to convey her world in her fashion, i.e. the ‘cultural memory’ of her place and time” (Heynders 356). For Dan Blue, “his versions seemed literal and disappointingly well-behaved. (...) He kept the ballad meter and rhymes, sometimes attempting slant rhymes; but the ballad in German carries overtones of 10th century romanticism (...) very wrong somehow for Yankee

¹⁰⁰ He ended up committing suicide, although there are also theories that suggest he was assassinated by the Soviet authorities.

Massachusetts” (144). Wortman expresses the sense of wrongdoing to her work more critically:

Celan’s translation conventionalizes and in large measure domesticates the fierce voice of Dickinson’s original. Often his own poems are composed of neologisms or syntactical ellipses foreign to normal usage (...) yet here in the translation, unlike the original, he uses no forms of words or syntax over which we must pause to parse, to make a part of our language. (136)

Indeed, many of these translations leave out part of the strangeness of Dickinson’s poems. Celan frequently omits dashes and the poems have titles (although the latter could have been the editor’s decision). What seems unusual in the English versions is closed and standardized in German. This leads to the following question: do his versions also contribute to reproduce a Dickinson that isn’t experimental, as many of her early editors did? Is Celan imposing a patriarchal order on her texts?

For a long time it was thought Celan had even omitted entire stanzas. This has been the most confusing point in the history of the reception of these translations. For years, scholars speculated his translations were based on the Johnson three volume variorum edition, which led to many misunderstandings. Blue, for example, writes: “Celan had used the Johnson transcriptions, though with dozens of changes, and twice (217 and 712) he had omitted entire stanzas” (144). And Wolosky asserts that “Celan’s translation in fact collates Dickinson’s two variants (...) he significantly passes over ‘Savior’ for ‘Father’ as a form both he and she can share” (“Apophatics” 66). It was only recently, in 2014, that Felstiner mentioned, at the end of a brief magazine article, that Celan owned the 1959 Anchor edition *Selected Poems and Letters of Emily Dickinson* when he published “*Acht Gedichte*.”¹⁰¹ It was edited by Robert N. Linscott, who did select the poems from Thomas Johnson’s three-volume variorum edition of Emily Dickinson’s poetry, which was published by Harvard in 1955 and which included, for the first time, all of Dickinson’s known poems, with their variant words and the inclusion of multiple versions of the poems. With this edition available, Linscott chose amongst different versions of poems according to his own criteria. Therefore, many of the changes scholars thought Celan had made, and the versions they thought he had chosen, actually

¹⁰¹ “Paul Celan Translating Others.” *World Literature Today*, (Nov 11 2014), web.

correspond to the versions Linscott included in this edition, which match the poems Celan published in *Die Neue Rundschau*.¹⁰²

The fact that the Anchor edition of Dickinson's poems came out in 1959 and that Celan's first Dickinson translation was published that same year indicates that he must have been very impressed by her work, wanting to translate her immediately, to come closer to her world in order to make sense of his. The poems he chose are fierce and transgressive, and some of the changes he makes aren't conventional: structurally, he interweaves modes of address and dialogue in poems that originally lack them, something that might not correspond to that specific poem but which is nonetheless coherent with the epistolary drives of Dickinson's writing.

4.3.1. TWO POEMS

I want to look closely at two poems and their translations in order to see what they contribute to the discussion of inoperativity, address and community as well as to the scarce body of work that has been done on Celan's Dickinson translations. The two poems I have chosen are included in "*Acht Gedichte*" (*Die Neue Rundschau*, 1961), Celan's selection of eight poems concerned with death, the passing of time, and God.

I will start with "Father –I bring thee –" (M139). It is highly relevant for my project because it is the only poem included in this selection which can be classified as a form of address. Moreover, it has the same epistolary structure as the Dickinson poems I analyzed before: it starts by addressing someone to whom it announces something is being sent off or given, but what is sent can't escape "the tragedy of destination;" it risks loss. Ultimately, the poem is an unanswered plea for reception. It connects to the rest of the poems of "*Acht Gedichte*" because the addressee is God. The combination of the poem's addressee and its structure of epistolary correspondence turn it into a poem of blasphemy: "an appeal to God turned against God," a genre that Dickinson and Celan have in common (Wolosky, "Apophatics" 66).¹⁰³

¹⁰² In "Dickinson's Poetry in Translation," Behnke says that "Johnson's 1960 [reading] edition might, however, have provided the textual basis for the fourteen other –unpublished– Dickinson translations by Celan still in his posthumous papers and or perhaps for "*Um halb vier*," his rendering into German of "At half–past three, a single bird," published in 1962.

¹⁰³ I'm going to compare the English version Celan used to the German version. I will add the alternative words included in Miller's edition of Dickinson's poems next to the poem in English (Celan didn't have access to these). I'm transcribing the poems in English and German directly from the edition in which Celan's translation is included (Celan, Paul. *Paul Celan Gesammelte Werke in Fünf Bänden*, Vol.5. Edited by

The version Celan translated was bound in fascicle 12 in 1862. A longer one was sent to Susan Dickinson later, which is the version that made people believe he had cut out a stanza or that he owned the Johnson three volume edition.

Father – I bring thee – not Myself –
That were the little load –
I bring thee the imperial Heart [the] departed
I had not strength to hold – [not] power

The Heart I cherished in my own
Till mine – too heavy grew –
Yet strangest – heavier – since it went –
Is it too large for you?

FATHER I BRING THEE NOT MYSELF

Ich bring dir, Vater, nicht mich selbst –	I bring thee, Father, not myself –
an mir trug ich nicht schwer.	I don't carry a load in me.
Ich bring das kaiserliche Herz,	I bring the imperial Heart.
das schwerer wog als schwer.	that weighed more than heavy.
Das ich, bis ich mich dran verhob,	The heart, until its weight injured me,
im eignen Herzen trug;	I carried it in my own heart;
dann gings und war erst recht die Last –	then it left and then it became a burden –
sag, hast du Kraft genug?	say, do you have enough strength?
	(390-391)

The German version reproduces the indentations of lines as they appear in the Anchor edition. Celan tries to preserve the rhymes and rhythmic patterns, and eliminates various dashes. These are some examples of why scholars argue that his translations are literal and conservative. However, some minor changes in his versions make Dickinson's poetry's own transgressive movements stronger and more manifest.

Beda Allemann and Stefan Reichert, 1983, pp.382-401). Next to Celan's version I'll attempt an English translation of his (without preserving the rhyming and rhythmic patterns).

To begin, let's affirm, with Wolosky, that this is a poem of blasphemy: God is addressed, but the poem turns against him by pointing out his weakness, by suggesting that he might not be *almighty*—the alternative words *strength* and *power* are both important in this respect— not powerful or strong enough to receive and carry the heavy heart. For Wolosky, this possibility represents a rupture between terrestrial experience and the transcendental. She stresses that the poetry of Celan and Dickinson constantly manifests this rupture as a linguistic crisis in which an irruption of silence and the dislocation of language make forms of meaning-making and saying collapse ("Apophatics" 67-68). In this case, then, "the line linking earth to heaven is a linguistic one" (68): contact with God is made through a linguistic appeal: address, which ends with an unanswered question. The expression of God's weakness and inability to carry the imperial heart is suggested by the ending of the poem: by opening a question, the poem stresses that a lack of power and of response is possible.¹⁰⁴

This poem releases the epistolary drives of Dickinson's poetry that I've developed earlier. It even has the same structure as "My River runs to Thee," the first poem discussed in chapter two. "My River runs to Thee – / Blue Sea – Wilt welcome me? // My River waits reply. / Oh Sea – look graciously! // I'll fetch thee Brooks / From spotted nooks // Say Sea – take me?" (M107) In this case, the addressee is specifically God, and what is sent is a heart instead of a river, although in both cases they can stand as metaphors of the poem that accurately represent Dickinson's concern with sending and non-arrival. This view gains additional support from Wolosky's assertion that the connection between what is sent and where it is headed is linguistic. So, following the movement of "My River runs to Thee," in this case a heavy heart is sent on its way to God.

The poem asks him to welcome the "departed" heart (Miller chooses to leave this alternative word in the body of the poem in her edition, instead of "imperial"). The emphasis on departure is relevant because it stresses that the person who sent it off is

¹⁰⁴ The assumption that, "Father," the addressee, is God, is agreed by scholars like Wolosky and Clarke. Moreover, the alternative version of this poem starts with the line "*Savior!* I've no one else to tell—" (my emphasis). In the particular case of Celan's translations we know he definitively reads this poem as an appeal to God due to the other poems selected for publication. I subscribe to this position, even though John Walsh makes a strong argument to believe that Dickinson's "heart imagery, led straight through the Master to Otis Lord" (43). In his argument he makes the point that "Master" and "God" are linguistic substitutes for "Lord." His argument is convincing, but even in the examples he quotes one does not exclude the other. In this passage from a Master letter, for instance, "God" and "Lord" cohabit: "God made me, Sir, I didn't be myself.... He built the heart in me. Bye and bye it outgrew me (...) I heard of a thing called redemption.... You remember I asked you for it...." (Dickinson in Walsh 44). Then he adds: "Who but her 'Lord' would she go to for redemption?" (44).

left behind, which corresponds to the dislodgement of the author and/or lyric subject we encounter constantly in Dickinson's poems and which is here announced in the very first line: "I bring thee – not Myself." This is symptomatic of Dickinson's stance on the disappearance of the author, the lyric subject and her inclination to the impersonal. Barbara A. Clarke reminds us that for Dickinson the heart "can be an alien presence that dispossesses her. In 'Father - I bring thee - not myself' (...), for example, she describes herself jilted first by being invaded, and then ruptured by an alien heart. We see her approach to God, not on her own behalf but for her heart" (28). This also says something about the religious nature of the poem: by not making the poem about the subject, it's neither a plea for salvation nor is the heart a religious offering. Rather, the poem is putting reception to the test and thus expresses linguistically the complex situation that Wolosky refers to, in which God's power is put in question –both refused and subtly desired– since his lack represents a source of anguish. This paradox turns God into an improbable reader-to-come (and we already know that her readers don't usually get to save the "little boats adrift").

The second line: "that were the little load," affirms the disappearance of the subject, "Myself," from line one. "That were the little load" is a line that works somewhat like Rimbaud's well-known "*je est un autre*," because it claims a rupture with self-sameness through grammar. "Myself?" doesn't refer to itself as a self-present "I:" not as "who am;" nor as a vanished "I" "who *was* the little load," but rather: *that were*. The importance is not so much *what* she was (past tense) or would have been (subjunctive mood), a load —the "content—" but the absence of the subject in the present that the past tense of *be* involves. Celan's version doesn't reproduce the past tense or step outside of itself. Instead, his speaker stays in the present, even though he interrupts the connection between the first two lines in order for each one to function independently. In this way, the first line remains the same, but the second announces that the load is no longer within the speaker, yet the speaker is still present ("*an mir trug ich nicht schwer*"). In the context of the discussion on unworking communities and the difference between the proposals of Blanchot and Nancy, as well as between Dickinson and Celan, we face, in the beginning of this poem, a different idea of the subject who releases the address –and who address releases. Dickinson's poem is inclined to the impersonal and to the loss of the speaking subject whilst Celan's poem preserves the presence of the speaker. Both versions reinforce this difference as they develop.

Something that might have attracted Celan to this poem could have been the relationship between anatomy and address. As we saw in a few cases, Celan uses body parts to represent a primordial plurality of being (vocal cords, the heart, fingertips). Some of his poems show that even the body, that finite, singular structure, is traversed by difference. In “Line the wordcaves” he uses the description of the rhythm and veins through which the heart pumps blood as a metaphor for the affectionate passages of address opened by poetic language. Although the ontological concern with *being-with* isn’t a problem for Dickinson, there is something very suggestive here: the heart her poem is sending was kept, before, in her own heart, so there was something foreign being cared for inside her body. Moreover, the heart plays the same role as the river in the other poem: the epistolary drives of language are set in motion by an organ that dwells in *foreign bodies* (similarly, the river was asking the sea to “take it”) –we can also see here that the drives of epistolary correspondence match those of translation.

In the Anchor edition, the heart is described with the adjective imperial, whilst Dickinson wrote an alternative word: “departed.” Probably because of the way in which Dickinson’s first two lines dislodge the subject from the event of sending and disconnect it from the object that is being sent, Celan’s version manages to channel this idea in the articulation of the second and third lines of the first stanza and the penultimate line of the second one. The notion of departure is significant when it comes to relating both poets because, in spite of the differences that separate their work, they both share the idea that a poem is always on its lonely way to someone else and, accordingly, that a poem is like a letter: always departed and always risking non-arrival.

The next two lines of the second stanza are translated more or less literally, but the first two of the second change: whilst Dickinson describes the heart’s weight, something objective, Celan focuses on the pain of its burden, the singular wound inflicted on the speaking subject. Perhaps this explains the omission we encounter in Celan’s version of the next lines. Dickinson’s poem says that, since its departure, the heart has become “stranger” and heavier. Celan leaves the strangeness part out and only stresses that it has become more of a burden. It is surprising that he leaves this out, considering how often the *Unheimlich* appears in *The Meridian* as well as how close he felt to the strange, to strangers.¹⁰⁵ But there is a very good reason for this omission.

¹⁰⁵ Let’s recall that in this speech he says that in poetry “the strange remains strange, it does not ‘correspond’ (and respond) *completely*, it retains its opacity” (MDM 71).

Celan was probably interested in distilling only one main point from the original: the way in which this poem's structure of address is a form of blasphemy in itself. By exclusively stressing that the heart has grown heavier, he makes God's challenge more central and arduous. In *Die Niemandrose*, which he started writing in 1959, Celan develops a relationship between address and weight based on a reflection from Mandelstam's "essay 'On the Interlocutor'." In this text Mandelstam thinks of the balance between the speaker of the poem and the addressee in terms of weight. He "condemns poetry in which the 'I' unjustly outweighs the 'non-I,' which reveals itself as 'too light' advocating a 'just balance' between the respective weight/gravity of self and other" (Eskin 257). In some poems from *Die Niemandrose*, Celan enacts "the opposite of what Mandel'shtam condemns: rather than being 'too light,' Celan's interlocutors are assessed as 'too heavy'" (*sic* 258). Accordingly, while Dickinson's formulation gave way to a reflection on the relationship between the disappearance of the subject and address, Celan only wants readers to pay attention to how the poem's structure of address challenges the possibility of reception, and of God. This explanation is more in tune with the thematic concerns of the other poems from "*Acht Gedichte*."

If this poem's structure of address were not carried out like a "letter in a bottle sent out to sea" it wouldn't be a poem of blasphemy. It's by means of opening a question about reception that the poem finally stresses the possibility of God's lack of power and response. This turns the last line into the most transgressive of the poem, which Celan must have identified with. He carries out a similar transgression, albeit more radical and direct, in the chorus of "*Tenebrae*," a poem that was published in *Sprachgitter* in 1959, the same year he was reading Dickinson: "pray Lord, / pray to us..." Moreover, Celan's version of Dickinson's poem also reproduces the imperative tone of "*Tenebrae*" by turning the last line into an imperative: "*sag, hast du Kraft genug?*" He demands that God answer. It stands out that the way in which Celan decides to end this poem is exactly like the river poem: "*Say Sea - take me?*" He thus picks up on the sense that for Dickinson the question about the poem's *envoi* and reception is performative, even though the performance of the reader is never guaranteed and no operation is ultimately carried out.

What we are looking at is an unworking poetics of reception –made up of unworking "acts" of reading and writing. In the preface to Blanchot's *The Unavowable Community*, Joris recalls that Marguerite Duras once said that Bataille "invents how not to

write while writing;" (xii) in the case of Celan and Dickinson we can say that they invite us not to read while reading, and that translation, in general, is a way of not writing while writing; of not reading while reading. At the core of this paradox lies an unreserved and unemployable negativity that language does not articulate or actualize.

Celan's imperative also alters the poem's tone. Instead of Dickinson's faux-naïf tone, which is a rhetorical recourse by means of which she asks a stabbing question, Celan is fierce and direct. Felstiner writes that "in Emily Dickinson's terms and in her time, solitude and religious yearning carry a different charge than for Paul Celan after 1939-45" ("Translating Celan" 113). Evidently, Dickinson doesn't have the same reasons as Celan to address God in this way. Celan was a direct victim of the genocide of a community that was united by the very God that he felt had betrayed them. But Dickinson did doubt and rebel against the Calvinist patriarchal structure and questioned her faith and the faith of those around her, perhaps for scientific reasons or also because during the Civil War she was well aware of the dying soldiers, which she referenced in some of her letters. This is why Wolosky accurately says, in the context of another Dickinson poem,¹⁰⁶ that it directs "Celan towards the genocide of a people and the destruction of a culture (although the historicity of Celan's translation suddenly brings into strong light the fact that Dickinson, as the dates plainly show, wrote the bulk of her verse in the context of her own culture's cataclysmic Civil War)" ("Apophatics" 81).

Let us recall the date-like structure or *partage* of translation in order to explore what's at stake here. When Celan is face-to-face with Dickinson's poetry he is exposed to the distance between them, a distance which, at the same time, makes him face his own place and time in history and his personal wounds, which is why the translations have a "more threatening" tone. But they also highlight a threatening tone that was present in Dickinson's poems. In the face-to-face of these translations, Celan opens the poems up to his own time as light is cast on Dickinson's time too. The event is thus a distant encounter and an encounter of distance. Even though *difference* is common to most translations, the specificity of this case is that Celan and Dickinson's unworking poetics dramatize this from the very start: nothing operates on a principle of sameness; when the original poem is in a specific *timbre*, when the translated version renounces the absolute translation and opens itself up to the impossible, the singularity and incompleteness of each version and of its time stands out. The reader and translator's response is deferred,

¹⁰⁶ "My life closed twice —"

like God's in the previous poem. In fact, *exactly* like that. Even though Celan's translation exists, it is still as improbable as God receiving the heart that the previous poem sends on its way. The relationship between the two versions is marked by finitude and loss, "the pained-mute vibrato" that the epistolary risks and drives of address and translation set free. What can't be translated is thus what, even in the original, cannot be read.

Let's read Celan's translation of "I reason, Earth is short — " (M215), another poem written by Dickinson during the timespan of the Civil War. There are two fair copies of the poem. She bound one into fascicle 20 and sent the other to Susan Dickinson that same year (1862). The latter is usually used by scholars in order to analyze her experimental rhythm and unusual line breaks, given how she located the words on the sheet of paper sent to Susan.¹⁰⁷ However, the Anchor edition includes the fascicle version, which is divided into three four-line stanzas:

I reason, Earth is short –
And Anguish – absolute –
And many hurt,
But, what of that?

I reason, we could die –
The best Vitality
Cannot excel Decay,
But, what of that?

I reason, that in Heaven –
Somehow, it will be even –
Some new Equation, given –
But, what of that?

I REASON EARTH IS SHORT

Ich denk: Dies währt nicht lang,
ein Ding ist, es heißt Bang,

I think: This is not long
there is a Thing, it's called Anguish.

¹⁰⁷ See: Manson, Michael L. "The Thews of Hymn.' Dickinson's Metrical Grammar." *A Companion to Emily Dickinson*. Edited by Martha Nell Smith and Mary Loeffelholz, Blackwell Publishing pp.368-390. And: Smith, Martha Nell. "Dickinson's Manuscripts." *The Dickinson Handbook*. Edited by Gudrun Grabher, Roland Hagenbüchle and Cristanne Miller University of Massachusetts Press, 1998, pp.113-137.

und weh tut Hand um Hand –
ja und?

and a hand wrapped in a hand hurts
yes, so?

Ich denk: Sieh zu, man stirbt,
der Saft, der in dir wirkst,
auch ihm gilt dies: Verdirb –
ja und?

I think: Look, one dies,
the Sap, that works in you,
also for it this is valid: Decay –
yes, so?

Ich denk: Im Garten Eden
alles wieder eben,
die Gleichung neu gegeben –
ja und?

I think: In Garden of Eden
All will be just again
the Equation newly given –
yes, so?

(394-395)

Celan translates some parts freely. He changes a few words, the punctuation, and at one point also adds an imperative in order to address the reader directly. In the last poem the reader is God; here the reader is one of us, a neighbor “on Earth,” in Dickinson’s terms, and someone who is “here,” in Celan’s. This minor difference is set up in the first line of both poems when Dickinson says that Earth is short and Celan that *this* is not long; we find out they are referring to the passing of time, to mortality, as the poem itself *passes*. For Felstiner “Celan’s *Dies* (“This”), while less astounding than “Earth,” pulls mortality into the here and now, this moment all around us” (“Translating Celan” 110). Of course, “Earth” is also “this moment all around us,” but “*Dies*” makes the poem start off with a claim of proximity. With this same objective Felstiner believes that the change to the colon from the original comma in that line makes it seem like the speaker of the poem is citing itself, and in this way stresses the speaking voice more than it is stressed in Dickinson’s poem, where the repetition of “I reason” sounds more rhetorical and, as such, impersonal. This stress thus plays a very similar role to the way Celan translated the second line of the previous poem we read, in which he stresses the self-presence of the speaker *contra* Dickinson’s dislodging intention.

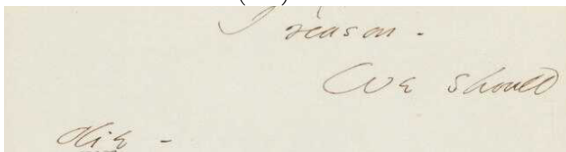
The connection between anguish and the length of life, which is only suggested in the way Dickinson connects the second line to the first through the conjunction “and,” is reinforced by Celan because he actually defines “This” (that life is not long) *as* anguish. The next line is similar in both versions except that whilst Dickinson writes “many,” Celan makes pain more personal by stressing the singularity of each person that

makes up the many through the metonymy of hands. However, he uses a very strange expression here: “*band um hand.*” It could be modeled after the biblical “Aug um Aug...” (“an eye for an eye”...), but it might also mean “around,” as one hand wrapped around another one. Given Celan’s inclination to think of the body as a limit but also as what exposes us to others, I think the latter interpretation of this line is more appropriate and propose we interpret it as an allusion to a form of proximity and touch in which limits are demarcated. These limits awaken the painful awareness of mortality, which, for Celan, always affirms our relation to others.

In this way, the poem starts to speak in a grave tone about the main obsession that Celan and Dickinson have in common: mortality.¹⁰⁸ It further addresses the preoccupation that draws Nancy and Celan close together: their concern with relating finitude to a thought on community. But the next line interrupts these grave reflections: “But, what of that?” Celan translates the question in the same tone: “*ja und?*” Although scholars acknowledge the sarcasm with which each stanza ends, they don’t take into account how it relates to the semantic depth of the preceding lines, which it both subtracts and interrupts. Smith, nonetheless, argues that the “thrice repeated clause ‘I reason’ and the query ‘But what of that?’ redirect the reader and recast her understanding to underscore the unreasonableness and irrationality of the Christian assurances Dickinson’s poems call into question” (125). They also highlight the worthlessness of thinking and speaking in the light of mortality.

Celan’s translation of the first line of the second stanza is very different to the original. Besides citing itself again, the speaker addresses the reader directly and imperatively: “Look here, one dies.” “Celan does not employ Dickinson’s ominous discreet conditional ‘we *could* die’ but rather a statement of hard fact, proven on his own pulse by the murder of both parents in a Nazi work camp” (“Translating Celan” 110). Dickinson’s *could* is rhetoric and ironical, like the *faux-naïf* question in the former poem. But most certainly following Felstiner’s argument, for Celan it’s urgent to say this directly: we are mortal, we die and we are killed. *Here* death is all around us. And you

¹⁰⁸ In the version Dickinson sent to Sue, “die” appears isolated, over-stressed, creating what Manson calls a “dramatic lineation” (356):



(Manuscript owned by the Houghton Library, Harvard University. Taken from: www.edickinson.org)

decay too, which is what the next line stresses in his version as he adds a “*dir*” to the reflection on vitality, whilst Dickinson speaks, without a personal pronoun, about “the best Vitality.” The “*dir*” stresses that a singular, decaying sap runs within each of us. In fact, Celan’s “*Verdirb*” is not descriptive but imperative too: Decay! In a sense, his version makes louder a certain aim that was already present in Dickinson’s: her “we” aims to include the readers, it wants us to feel the anguish and awareness from the first stanza.¹⁰⁹ By addressing readers directly, Celan’s poem reinforces this appeal. But, just as before, the last line of the stanza mockingly interrupts the point being made.

The last stanza helps to clarify why it was possible for Dickinson to write something like “we could die,” whilst Celan must write: “*Sieh zu, man stirbt...*” He translates “Heaven” by “*Garten Eden*” instead of “*Himmel*.” He thus inscribes the poem “into his own tradition of loss and redemption” (Felstiner, “Translating Celan” 109). The Hebraic and mythical Garden of Eden belongs to the past; unlike heaven, which represents futurity and recompense. For Dickinson it represents “both the promise and failure of Christianity” (Manson 388). In “*Der Spruch des Anaximander*,” a text Celan knew well, Heidegger defines the seer –and thus the translator– as the one who is “*gegenwärtig*” (Glazova, *Counter-Quotation* 120), in the present or actual. It is important to take this into account because this is exactly where he stands when he is faced with translating “Heaven” and decides that the Christian promise was not sustainable from where he was standing. The promise of any future in the arms of God had already been violently broken with the *Shoah* and the betrayal of what drew the community together: God, myth, the Garden of Eden itself. Thus, Celan is not concerned with grieving the future, but with grieving the dead, who won’t return. As Felstiner recalls in his own reading of this translation, in 1960 Celan wrote: “Over all this grief / of yours: no / second heaven.”¹¹⁰ Terrestrial inequality, death and grief matter here and now, and there is no erasing or rewriting what has happened.

Yet there is no redemption in Dickinson’s version either. In her poem this stanza represents a critique of religion, of the Protestant values that promote living for and

¹⁰⁹ If we take into account the other version of the poem, in which “die” is presented as a solitary syllable, we are also lead to think that dying also remits to loneliness, to something absolutely unsharable, even though it is common.

¹¹⁰ Felstiner presents a fascinating and well-informed reading of this poem, “The Sluice,” in his biography of Celan. He informs us the poem was written the same day Celan met Buber, making it “an explicitly Judaic lyric addressed to himself and to Nelly Sachs, his ‘sister.’ (...) ‘The sluice’ came out of resistance to Clare Goll’s plagiarism campaign, mischance with Martin Buber, and painful solidarity with Nelly Sachs” (161-163).

investing in the afterlife. This criticism is carried out through the tone of the final “But, what of that,” which becomes more significant here than it was before in the sense that it adds meaning to the former lines rather than subtract it: *who cares* about what happens in Heaven if there is no evenness or equality on Earth? For Nancy Mayer, this Dickinson poem

...insists upon interrogating rather than simply accepting the promise of heaven and (...) the interrogation takes place inside the earth-bound pain the speaker inhabits. The last “But, what of that?” is written from the place where Dickinson writes best, inside an anguished, living response to pain and death; and from that perspective the promised “somehow” is simply irrelevant. (63)

We are facing the differences and similarities that Wolosky refers to when she says that Dickinson and Celan express a rupture between “terrestrial experience and divine transcendence.” Dickinson refuses to think of life “on Earth” from the protestant perspective of eternal redemption, and this possibility makes her fearful of her own disbelief as it simultaneously turns the present earthly existence into a greater cause of suffering and concern. In Celan’s case, the crisis also ends up making him concentrate on the present; however, his rupture is not facing the future but the past.

4.3.2. BUT, WHAT OF THAT?

As we see in these examples, the translations don’t operate on a principle of sameness, paraphrase or imitation. Celan’s versions “obey the laws” of his place and time, and his words resonate with a different tradition and history than Dickinson’s. But they also share similar concerns in regard to content, style and form, and the way these relate. In the two cited poems, these concerns are basically the appeal to God, mortality, irony, and the centrality of poetic address. These concerns are what the two poets share; whereas the divide is determined by the time and place in which they wrote and thus the distance between their relationships with God and religion, the weight that the concept of mortality carries in each case, and the modes and tones of address. This is, more generally, the difference that any case of translation brings to the fore.

Celan’s translations performatively carry out the concept of *partage* in the way in which the sharing and divide are interrelated: sharing sheds light on the divide and the

divide sheds light on what is shared.¹¹¹ For instance, in “Father – I bring Thee –” the way Celan modifies the original’s poetic address allows the irony in the original to speak more strongly. Because Celan’s last line adds an imperative (*say*, are you strong enough?) where Dickinson writes: “is it too large for you?” his version allows us to see that Dickinson’s speaker was also challenging God. In this sense the translation adds something to the singularity of Dickinson’s situation that many might not find obvious: not only that she wrote these poems during the Civil War timespan, but also the way that this situation affected her had a metapoetic and unworking response. The same thing happened to Celan during the period of time I have been focusing on: the question about how to write after the *Shoah* demanded a reflection on language that led him to develop a way to use poetic language capable of resisting the violent dynamics of appropriation and reconciliation. And it looks like he found answers, or at least new possibilities of developing these questions, in Dickinson’s work: for example, her sense of deferral, the way in which the irony of some lines help subtract meaning from the poems, and the epistolary drives of poetry, which were already a matter of reflection in his own work.

A strong example of how this play between the sharing and divide takes place in the translations is the way in which Celan makes direct interpellations, in order to add more pressure to the addressee, in lines where Dickinson’s poems sound softer and more naïf. When he adds direct interpellation where Dickinson’s poem lacks it, it doesn’t strike us as foreign to Dickinson’s writing style, which has the epistolary drive of address at its core; but we do get the sense that something particular to Dickinson’s style has not been translated, something that also speaks about how she felt or about how she was expected to think, speak, believe and behave as a woman and as a member of a Protestant family in the 1860’s in New England.

¹¹¹ A position like Therese Kaiser’s could benefit from using the concept of *partage* that I am transposing to the field of translations studies in order to describe what she considers the specificity of Celan’s practice. Failing to find the concepts to describe it, she ends up tying it to a notion of fidelity that is not the case at all. She writes: “Celan’s metaphorical conception of the translation process defines translation as *difference*, meaning, in terms of the traditional translation discourse, *freedom* from the original, not the fidelity desired by tradition and convention. But (...) the model also draws attention to a main quality of poetry translation that is opposed to the concept of *difference* – the necessary and constant interdependence of the two poetic texts. (...) Celan does not only leave behind the original environment of the translated words but also combines *difference* and *fidelity* while crossing the gap and carrying the language material to the other side...” (238-239). Ultimately, thinking about what translation meant for Celan requires an ontological framework that the concept of *partage* responds to and which Kaiser doesn’t take into account, limiting her understanding of what’s at stake here to a tension between fidelity (the same) and separation. The idea of *partage* gives way to an ontological thinking that combines singularity and difference without reducing either of the texts to the same, opening them to relation from the very start. After all, as Celan wrote in the same letter to Weber that I quoted earlier: “Language, especially in the poem, is ethos – ethos as a fateful concept of truth” (in Gellhaus and Kaiser 236).

This is the case of the last question of “Father – I bring Thee –”: “Is it too large for you?” and the verse “I reason, we could die.” These are cases of what politeness theory designates as negative politeness, in which the speaker makes use of an indirect style, such as a question or a modal verb, in order to avoid threatening the recipient. In *A Poet’s Grammar*, Miller argues that Dickinson uses “language patterns” that were stereotypically associated with the feminine in the nineteenth century (107). Although she clarifies that there are no empirical studies of gender and speech from then, “advice books to women on proper behavior include frequent instructions on language use, tonal inflection and manner of speaking. A woman’s voice is to be above all soft and gentle (...). She is never to say anything in word or tone that might hurt or offend a listener” (109-110).

Celan translates these two lines with a direct address and an imperative: “*sag, hast du Kraft genug?*” and “*Sieh zu, man stirbt.*” For German speakers it would have been impossible to hear the irony of these lines and not start to wonder why Dickinson felt it was better to write these stabbing lines in that tone. In this sense something of her time and *timbre* is lost, perhaps a sign of pain. But these are also the places where Celan’s translations are fiercer. Did he decide to leave her wounds out, perhaps thinking they were untranslatable, and make space for his? Are these lines points of resistance to the work; lines in which unreserved negativity and incompleteness break free in the original and in the translation? The fact that his translations are fierce in these specific points suggests that he was definitively aware of their strength, but as a sign of Dickinson’s singularity they might have stood as “a bar of language” that he could only translate in his own painful (and male) *vibrato*. For Celan, as Wolosky comments, a translator should not “heal the linguistic wounds or seal the linguistic gaps” (“On (Mis)Translating” 145) of the poems.

If we take these translations as a testimony of how Celan reads, we see that his translation style coincides with his understanding of the poetic address: he demarcates the site of Dickinson’s wounds by being fiercer there, by encountering something common to the wounds of both: a singular mark of finitude and pain. On this account, Celan was more concerned with engaging in a “desperate dialogue” with Dickinson (the meeting of two finite beings) than with the effective task of translating the poet from one linguistic community into another, even though by deciding to publish the translations he did want to share and make public that Dickinson’s work spoke to his time and contemporaries.

In order to think of these translations as a “desperate dialogue” we have to accept that there is no absolute translation and that there is also *an essential darkness of translation*.

I'm especially interested in understanding the dialogue that takes place between the poets in the context of the discussion of unworking communities and poetics rather than in the light of a more metaphysical or theological context, paths these poems would also allow us to explore. I mentioned earlier that the principle of incompleteness is precisely what connects both poets' resistance to the *work* and the practice of translation to the discussion on the unworking. So, what do these (mis)encounters in translation disclose about the relationship between these poets and philosophers?

The similarities between the practice of translation and unworking communities that the Dickinson-Celan relationship puts forward, as well as the unworking community that takes place *in* each translation itself illuminate similarities and differences between Nancy and Blanchot. More specifically, the two translations above allow us to reflect on the unworking specifically in two respects: the poem's resistance to reception and the whole, and the notion of the subject. Both philosophers agree that it is extremely important to resist completion, to unwork the common through the inscription and exposure of finitude which, following Bataille, they call writing or communication and which I have developed, in dialogue with poetics, from the perspective of address (which overlaps with reception). But they have a different understanding of the unworking subjects.

Following Bataille's principle of incompleteness, Nancy and Blanchot believe, as I quoted in chapter one, that "what one calls a 'being' is never simple (...) it is undermined by its profound inner division..." (Bataille, *Inner Experience* 96). This is the subject of the inoperative community that Nancy promotes, which, like Celan's poetic subjects, is primordially marked by an inner division. From Nancy's point of view the quotation marks that frame "being" in the cited sentence are unnecessary. For Blanchot they are. He doesn't think community is an ontological condition because he believes ontological thinking cannot escape the attraction to the same. For him, the subject of an inoperative community is constantly losing itself—ceasing to be a being (and not only a "whole" being, as Nancy thinks): "in order to exist [the subject] goes towards the other, which contests and at the same time negates it, so as to start being only in that privation that makes it conscious (...) of the impossibility of being itself, of subsisting as its *ipse*" (Blanchot, *TUC* 6). Briefly, for Nancy the subject of community is never self-present, it is always open and cut across by difference, by what it is not. Blanchot's subjects are becoming non-subjects, relating to each other through separation and loss rather than through the openness of their being. Celan's translations of Dickinson shed light on these differences and affirm the

nearness between Dickinson and Blanchot, and Nancy and himself.

Understanding community as a relationship in which subjects are vanishing draws Dickinson and Blanchot close together. In the first poem included in this section we saw that Dickinson's first line starts by dislodging "Myself" from the poem and that, at the end, the presence of the addressee is deferred too; their relationship takes place through separation. In the second poem the "I" is impersonal and a rhetorical device in service of the thrice repeating "I reason." Celan, closer to Nancy, doesn't exclude the speakers from the poems. As we saw above, in the first one he changes Dickinson's use of the past tense in order to maintain the presence of the "I," which is nonetheless fissured by announcing that "I" is not "Myself" and that it kept the foreign heart inside his. In the second poem the "I" is stressed through the change of punctuation that makes it seem like the speaker is citing its own voice. But to cite oneself is also an experience of exteriority. Celan's "I" is in this sense poorly closed, marked by a division that is no more inner than it is outer.

In regard to sending all authors are more in agreement. In both versions of the first poem the "heart" is sent and reception is deferred. This is necessary for the poem to remain free, open, and inoperative. Through the recourse of leaving open an unanswered question, the poem promises to be affirmed performatively but the performative act is deferred. This way the poem becomes an inoperative piece of epistolary correspondence that resists being acted upon. As Celan writes in *The Meridian*, "poems are always on their lonely way to the other," they carry "the question of their where-from and where-to: a question that 'stays open,' 'does not come to an end,' that points toward the open, empty and free—we are far outside" (*MDM* 10). Nevertheless, in both cases non-arrival is not necessarily meant in a physical way. For even if a poem still reaches readers physically, in the sense, for instance, that we get hold of such and such a book, a poem still doesn't arrive whole in the sense that we can't grasp it completely (Celan casts down the bars of language, Dickinson releases her unworking spiders). An inoperative poetics of reception is thus developed in each case. Every poem becomes an event made up by *callings* and *pleas* rather than by fulfilled, operative acts of reading and writing. In the section "Community and Writing" in *The Unavowable Community*, Blanchot says that the inoperative community

...gives rise to an unshared though necessarily multiple speech in a way that does not let it develop itself in words: already lost, it has no use, creates no work and does not glorify itself in that loss. Thus the gift of speech, a gift of "pure" loss that cannot make sure of ever being received by the other, even though the other is the only one to make possible,

if not speech, then at least the supplication to speak which carries with it the risk of being rejected or lost or not received. (12)

Blanchot's reflection on the writing of community also seems to obey the logic of the post and the drives of epistolary correspondence, which value loss, sending, and the absence of the sender and the addressee, even more than the message a text carries and which would allow the reader to appropriate it. Blanchot's words strikingly recall the first poem I cited here, which has a structure of address that almost resembles prayer but is actually a supplication of reception that ends in deferral and blasphemy, a structure that Celan is willing to translate into his space and time.

For Nancy, literary communism is also strongly related to this last aspect: not with what's said but with what falls silent, is not legible and resists becoming a work. Writing is a way of sharing and exposing being-in-common, which he also calls sense, when the latter, as I mentioned in chapter one, "does not entail that something be signified; rather, it entails the difficulty of saying." ("Around the Notion" 29). Both "the supplication of speech" and the "difficulty of saying" are accurate descriptions of the approach to translation that I assumed throughout this section because they describe the resistance to meaning and to the fulfillment of reading, writing, and translating carried out in the texts by both poets. This resistance in language never ceases to address and expose itself to others.

I would like to end by remarking that, in the context of literature and unworking communities, translation is a practice that shares the difficulties that Nancy and Blanchot problematize when they question the concept of the common that any thought on community presupposes. In their attempts to relate finitude and dying to a thought on community in *The Inoperative Community* and *The Unavowable Community*, "the common" is never presented as a given; rather, "only the limit is common" (TIC 73). For immanent, operative communities, the common is always either the shared essence of a group or an aim that must be achieved. Literary translation is meaningful in this light because it constantly tests and takes to the limit the possibilities of the common, through the "desperate dialogue" between different languages and the making, transformation and withdrawal of meaning. This is why *partage* is a useful concept to introduce in translation studies; especially in cases like Celan's where the limits are dramatized and the sharing and divide are mutually determining.

In Celan's translations the asymmetries between both versions make us aware of the

unemployable negativity that resists the moment of identity in the original work, of the different modes of signification between both languages, of the texts' resistance to semantics and of the translator's –and the writer's– impossibility of appropriating either of these two texts. This limit is where unworking communities happen. This is where Yesenin and Celan part ways as they shake hands, where Dickinson's rhetoric of politeness takes the form of Celan's threatening imperative: Decay!

Almost a Loneliness (Conclusion)

My thesis aimed to relate the work of four different writers on account of their understanding and practice of literary address, when it is not subjected to the functions of identification, representation and signification. For Blanchot, Dickinson, Celan, and Nancy, literary address opens relations that thwart self-presence, question what is common, and are always haunted by finitude. The treatment they each give to the certainty and impossibility of dying illuminates their reflections in a different light. Studying this, I have tried to make a mark in a theoretical map, first unfolded by Plato in books 3 and 10 of *The Republic*, where philosophy and poetics meet. In the process, I also came across translation studies. Translation is a practice of address that can perfectly be understood as what *communicates* communities in an operative and immanent sense, yet is also cut across by failure and impossibility. I have argued that this failure is not only rooted in the process of translation but has to do with an incompleteness that affects the original works themselves, paradoxically destining them to translation and to the impossibility of translation from the very beginning.

The relationships I develop between these four writers revolve around the unworking, finitude and address. I concentrated on poetic address in regard to each poet independently in order to contribute to Celan and Dickinson studies, which my questions engage with and develop. In the context of Blanchot and Nancy, I have concentrated specifically on a discussion that took place in the 80's and which Nancy reopened only two years ago with the publication of *The Disavowed Community*. In this regard, my thesis also contributes to reemerging scholarship on this debate and, more importantly, to the scarce body of scholarship that deals with the relationship between what both authors call literature and community in *The Unavowable Community* and *The Inoperative Community*. The relationships I trace between the pairs Dickinson-Blanchot and Celan-Nancy, contribute to the fields of philosophy, poetics, literary theory, and philosophy and literature. These relationships expand the horizon of what we call poetics and what we call philosophy by dislocating their boundaries and showing that they are both equally engaged with language, literarity, finitude, ethics, being-with, intertextuality, textual criticism, incompleteness and ontology. Throughout the thesis we saw how these

authors deal with these issues from different positions and concerns, to the extent in which I was able to pair them up the way I did.

It stands out that one of these four writers belongs to a different epoch, continent and gender. Setting Dickinson amongst these three continental, and mid-to-late 20th century male writers has driven me to develop a new philosophical account of her work that steps away from a tradition of romantic and epistemological interpretations and contributes to theoretical studies on her notion of address as well as to a trend of textual criticism that is currently rethinking and revaluing her work through different means, such as academic texts, manuscript exhibits and alternative poetry editions. It is precisely because of her manuscripts' resistance to the book and what it represents –unity, completion, final drafts, commerce– and because of her history of (mis)publications, since her death and up until today, that Blanchot becomes a particularly strong interlocutor, especially on account of his understanding of literature's unemployable negativity. They both see and seek connections between dying and the squander of the subjects through the unworking and unavowable moments of address and reading.

The 10 published translations by Celan of her poems have not been the subject of any particularly notable study even though they are included in his complete works, and even though both poets have common fields of interest and concerns that have drawn scholars attention to Celan's own *oeuvre* for decades. Moreover, they were published at a turning point in his approach to poetic language. A reason for this lack might be that significant twentieth century philosophers and literary theorists ignored Dickinson's work. In "Emily Dickinson and the Theory Canon" Marjorie Perloff asks why she was excluded from deconstructionist, post-structuralist, Marxist and feminist theories. She argues the exclusion is not only based on her gender but on the tendency for these theorists and theories to privilege romantic or modernist writers, like Wordsworth, Whitman, Eliot, Pound, Beckett, and Lispector, to name only a few she mentions.

Perloff uses two contra-examples: Paul De Man's reading of Wordsworth, and her own comparison of Dickinson and Celan; the latter, she recalls, has been an exemplary poet for Gadamer, Blanchot, Derrida and Lacoue-Labarthe. Her comparison is based on one of the published translations from 1961: "Four trees – upon a Solitary Acre –." Perloff's conception of Celan and Dickinson's poetics differs from my own.

She compares Celan's linguistic precision to Flaubert's *mot juste*, and differentiates it from Dickinson's word variants, which, according to Perloff, create "ambiguity" but not "indeterminacy" (I understand this difference as semantic ambiguity but not ontological indeterminacy, an idea my second chapter argues against). Moreover, in the third chapter, I referred to Celan's critique of how his contemporaries inherited Mallarmé's ideas and showed that his proximity with Mandelstam began almost as an allegiance against a modernist and mechanist understanding of language, which is precisely the aspect of modernism that Perloff ascribes to Celan. However, the reason I am invoking Perloff's essay is because of her conclusive explanation:

...if Dickinson is not a Modernist, she is, ironically, very much a precursor of what we might call the "differential" poetics of our own time—"differential" in that there is not one "correct" or even preferred text—but a variorum set that allows the reader to consider alternatives. (...) [H]er visual poetics—the reliance of the look on the page to create and challenge meanings—is nothing if not postmodern. The question, and it is one that deserves much further discussion, is one of aesthetic distance, the relationship between the poet and her readers. (Web)

I agree with Perloff's remark: the question of aesthetic distance, which is also a relational distance, is the core of the relationships involved in Dickinson's poetry, epistolary correspondence, and her narratives of dying others. It determined her structure of address and writing practices, which is exactly the reason why it is relevant to articulate her thought to the other thinkers of my thesis. Perloff's classification of Dickinson as postmodern due to her visual poetics and alternative words relies highly on her manuscripts and variorum editions, which is something that the theorists she recalls most probably weren't aware of. This leads me to finally express the most disquieting conclusion of my research: in the process of writing the thesis I realized that there is currently a theoretical problem underlying Dickinson scholarship: the fetishization of the original.

Some of the most valuable representations of her work, like *Open Folios* (1995), *The Gorgeous Nothings* (2013), the exhibit *The Networked Recluse* (2016), and the very possibility of accessing the digital manuscript archive, contribute to the idea that, since the poems cannot be accurately published in print, we have to find ways of publishing and circulating the originals in order to appreciate her work appropriately. Cristanne

Miller resists this position, but only because she thinks that Dickinson did write for a printed medium.

Contra Dickinson's "*oeuvre's*" incompleteness and unemployed negativity, the fetishization of the original runs the risk of reproducing an idealist, hierarchical structure that leads to the notion of an *arche* that is at the beginning of everything, self-present and self-enclosed, ready to explode and produce the many. But Dickinson's manuscripts aren't an originary, self-present unity: they are "consigned" to loss and incompleteness. Therefore, scholars and editors need to start taking into account the risks involved in the decision to privilege the circulation and representation of the manuscripts. Reading her work in dialogue with these three writers, who think about writing and relationality beyond logocentrism and the metaphysics of presence, has allowed me to see this risk clearly and to understand why scholars have the responsibility to clarify it: otherwise, the manuscripts will end up becoming another romantic manifestation of her work, the blue flower in Novalis's Henrich von Ofterdingen's dreams, which represents the desire of the absolute that attempts to close the open and relational space of the unworking.

Nancy and Blanchot encounter the unworking and the unavowable in different kinds of literature, address and reception. It is unleashed in Dickinson's poems as much as in Celan's, even in her published reading editions, because even in the form of a book her poems still address others and the books are read –amongst limits–. So, in regard to Dickinson, we have to start asking where the myth lies: is scholarship driving the myth toward the manuscripts? If so, it must be interrupted. This doesn't require that scholars divert the readers' attention from the originals, but that they critically revise the way in which they read and represent them, and what they choose to listen to and value.

In retrospect, every chapter of my thesis refers, in one way or another, to the fact that there is no unitary self-present and self-enclosed origin. The reflection I carry out on translation in the context of the 10 Dickinson poems Celan translated also addresses this: the original text, the one that is to be translated into another language is never complete or self-present, it is always "at the edge of itself." Moreover, Nancy and Blanchot are both keen to explain and develop why they are not concerned with recovering a lost community: because there has never been an originary community. The resistance to the original opens another possibility: literary address as an elemental, differential and finite way of being together. Together in the sense that Dickinson perceives when she writes: "You, unsuspecting, feel for me / Almost a loneliness."

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